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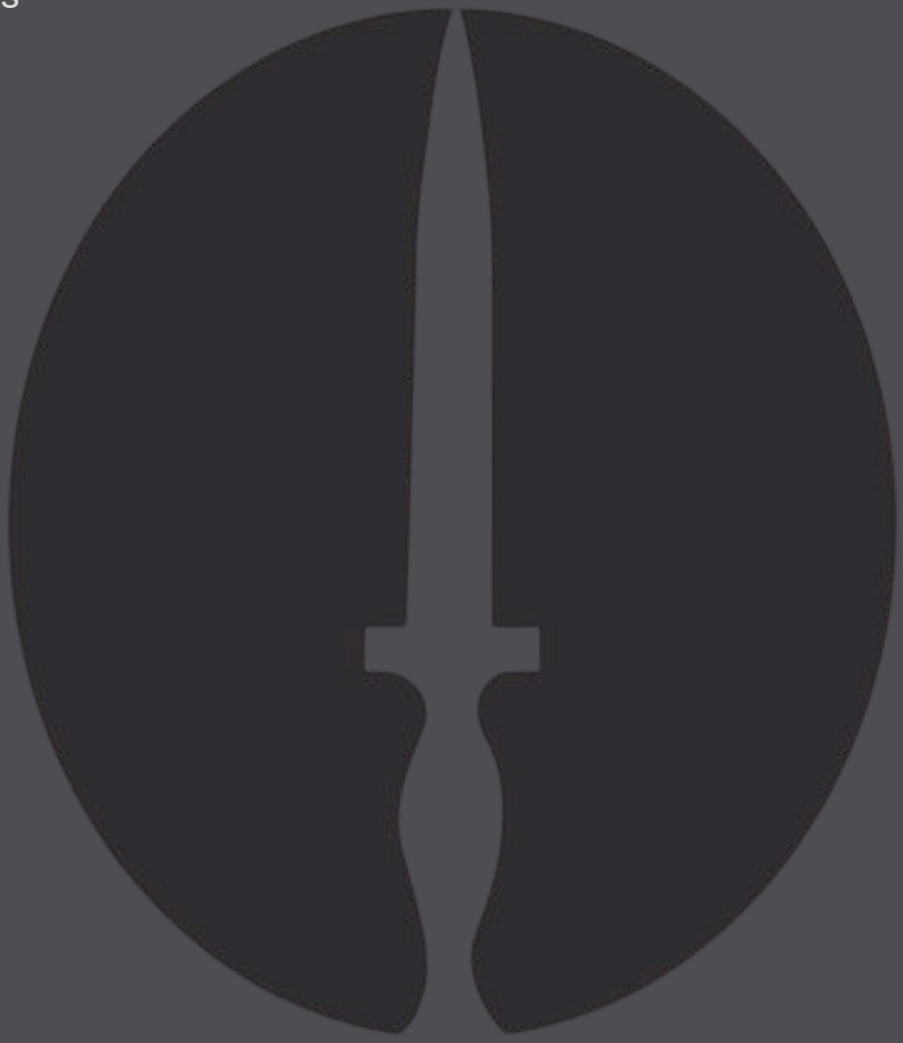

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# Russia's Indirect and Asymmetric Methods as a Response to the New Western Way of War

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This research explains the context in which General Valery Gerasimov's often cited article, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations" published February 26, 2013, in Military-Industrial Courier was written. Furthermore it explains why "Gerasimov's Doctrine" is not a new Russian development, but is a response to the West's new way of war, and description of the future of war in general.

Keywords: Gerasimov Doctrine, Russia, Ukraine, Crimea, Spetsnaz, strategy, tactics, operational art

Approximately one year before Russia annexed Crimea, General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff, outlined his vision of the future of warfare in a February 26, 2013, article in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (Military-Industrial Courier) titled "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations." In this article Gerasimov (2013) sees the future of warfare as a blending of the instruments of national power to create favorable outcomes: "In the 21st century, a tendency toward the elimination of the differences between the states of war and peace is becoming discernible. Wars are now not even declared, but having begun, are not going according to a pattern we are accustomed to."

## CORRECT TERMINOLOGY: "HYBRID WARFARE" OR "INDIRECT AND ASYMMETRIC METHODS"?

Gerasimov's article has been interpreted, and reinterpreted, by several different authors since its publication. One of the first notable attempts was by Col. S. G. Chekinov and Lt. Gen. S. A. Bogdanov (2013) in a *Military Thought* article titled "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War," in which Gerasimov's theory was expanded. Janis Berzins (2014), a Latvian academic, used this article as the basis for his schematic of the eight phases of Russian new-generation war, which has become one of the most frequently cited

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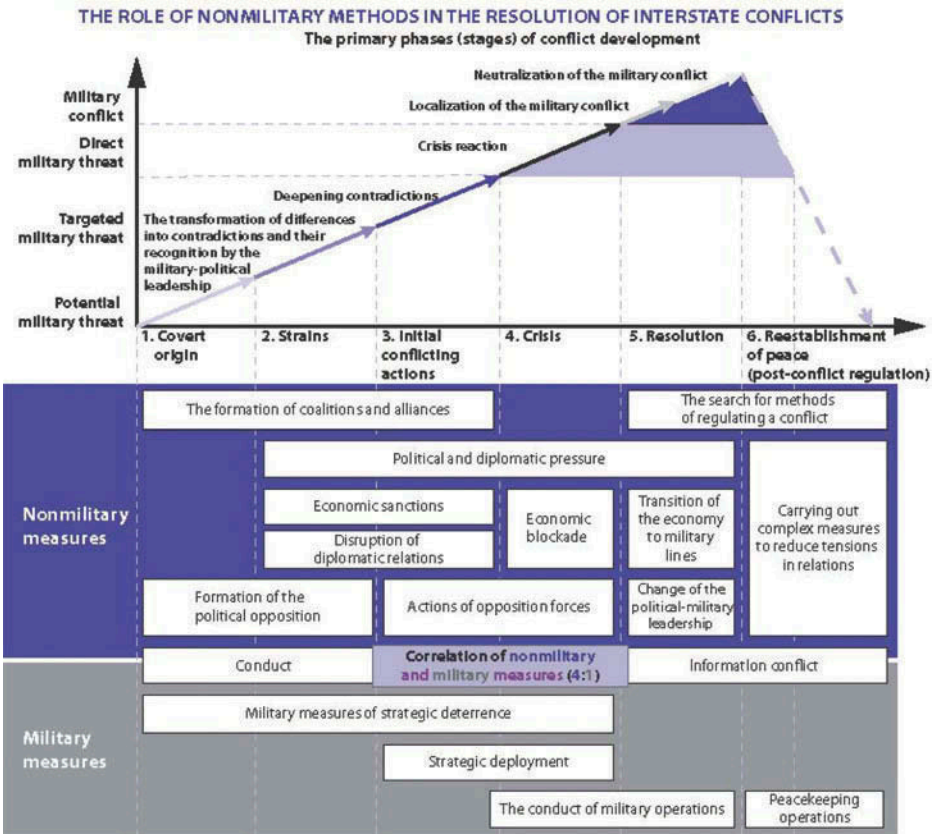


FIGURE 1 From Valery Gerasimov's "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, February 26, 2013, http://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632, accessed April 15, 2014. Translation by author.

pieces on the topic. Several Russian and non-Russian pundits have been quick to point out that at no time did Gerasimov ever mention these eight phases of new-generation war or, as Western analysts have dubbed it, "hybrid warfare." They have also noted that the new forms and methods of warfare mentioned in Gerasimov's article were not really new at all but a continuation of methods developed in Soviet times. Although these points can be well argued, this study proposes that the idea of Russian hybrid warfare, as dubbed by the West, would be better described by the Russian term "of indirect and asymmetric methods" (*neprymyk i asimmetrichnykh sposobov*), which is used in 2014 Russian military doctrine and was used by Gerasimov when he described his vision of the new way of warfare, as can be seen in Figure 1 (Russian Ministry of Defense, 2014).

## WHAT IS NEW: THE 4:1 RATIO—NONMILITARY VERSUS MILITARY MEASURES

Perhaps the "new" aspect of this theory of war is the relationship between the military and nonmilitary methods of war. The leveraging of all means of national power to achieve victory in state-on-state conflict is nothing new for Russia, but the primacy of effort was always focused on the military's use of force projection. The political, economic, and informational levers were applied by the other various apparatuses of the state (e.g., foreign ministry, intelligence service), but these were generally considered far less important tools than the Soviet/Russian Army. This fundamental difference can best be described by the way the militaries use the term *operational art*. In U.S. *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 context, operational art is defined as

> [t]he use of creative thinking by commanders and staffs to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces. It is a thought process that uses skill, knowledge, experience, and judgment to overcome the ambiguity and uncertainty of a complex environment and understand the problem at hand. Operational art also promotes unified action by encouraging JFCs [Joint Force commanders] and staffs to consider the capabilities, actions, goals, priorities, and operating processes of interorganizational partners, while determining objectives, establishing priorities, and assigning tasks to subordinate forces. It facilitates the coordination, synchronization, and, where appropriate, integration of military operations with those of interorganizational partners, thereby promoting unity of effort. (Department of Defense, 2011)

In practice, this definition has led the U.S. military and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces to think about not just the military aspects of force projection but also the coordination of the full gamut of the state's means of leverage to achieve a desired end state. In contrast, the definition of the term in a Soviet/Russian context is much more military oriented:

> Operational art encompasses the theory and practice of preparing for and conducting operations by large units (fronts, armies) of the armed forces. It occupies an intermediate level between strategy and tactics. "Stemming from strategic requirements, operational art determines methods of preparing for and conducting to achieve strategic goals." Operational art in turn "establishes the tasks and direction for the development of tactics." Soviet operational art provides a context for studying, understanding, preparing for, and conducting war. (Glantz, 1991)

In general, the term *operational art* has a significantly different meaning for Russia than for the West, though the former developed the term from its analysis of Russian doctrine. In a Russian context, operational art has typically been thought of in the way that the great Soviet military thinkers (e.g., Tukhachevsky, Svechin, and their successors) have focused solely on military matters, such as maneuvering of large military formations for optimum effect.

From a Russian military perspective these new "forms and methods," as proposed by Gerasimov, are indeed a "new" way of conducting warfare. The use of partisan forces and special operations forces (SOF), intelligence services, and propaganda to conduct provocations and shape the area of operations were certainly old tricks in the Soviet/Russian playbook, but these activities were secondary in comparison to the major actions of the conventional warfighter, who did not engage in these other activities. Russia now sees the conventional warfighter as having a role in these activities and has even published a new edition of field manuals that will assist the commander in performing "other tasks of military and nonmilitary conflict resolution." This is a major change from previous editions of these field manuals, which concerned only high intensity combat operations (Korabelnikov, 2014).

Most importantly, the primacy of effort has now shifted from military to nonmilitary methods, by a factor of 4:1. This is indeed a new development in Russian military thinking. The Russian military will now need to be more concerned with nonmilitary methods, as are its NATO counterparts. Gerasimov's article and the 2014 Russian military doctrine both make the point that the primary threat of regime change comes not from a nuclear attack or a conventional invasion but from nonmilitary sources, such as "color revolutions." Although nuclear deterrence capability is still required, Russia believes it must now focus on military and nonmilitary methods to deter such a threat (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, pp. 171–172, 246; McDermott, 2014).

## RUSSIAN INDIRECT AND ASYMMETRIC METHODS IN RESPONSE TO THE "WESTERN WAY OF WAR"

Another reason that Gerasimov's theory should be considered new stems from the context in which the theory was developed. His theory is not a Russian-specific prescription for warfare; rather, it is a theory of how warfare, in general, is being conducted. In his view these "new forms and methods" were first practiced by the United States and Great Britain and are becoming the new "Western way of war." As discussed previously, nonmilitary methods would be used at a 4:1 ratio in relation to military methods. In the Russian view, the "color revolutions" and "Arab Spring" movement were Western (primarily U.S. and British) implementations of these new forms and methods. As described at a conference on the subject recently in Moscow, Russian defense minister Shoigu was quoted as saying that

> color revolutions were a new form of warfare invented by Western governments seeking to remove national governments in favor of ones that are controlled by the West, in order to force foreign values on a range of nations. He made the argument that the same scheme has been used in a wide range of cases, with the initial goal of changing the government through supposedly popular protests, shifting into efforts at destabilizing and fomenting internal conflict if the protesters are not successful. This scheme was used in Serbia, Libya, and Syria—all cases where political in interference by the West transitioned into military action. Now the same scheme is being followed in Ukraine, where the situation in recent weeks has become a virtual civil war, and in Venezuela, where the so-called democratic opposition is actually organized by the United States. (Papert, 2014)

According to Russian military theorists, these new ways of warfare were promoted by strong informational resources (e.g., Internet, social media) and were further propagated by Western government–sponsored nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As nations attempt to quell the unrest caused by these methods, the West is quick to use diplomatic means to "tie the hands" of these nations from using greater degrees of force as they attempt to maintain order. If the West's goals are achieved, the government will be toppled and a new Western-friendly government will be installed. If not, the West will resort to economic sanctions and eventually use human rights abuses as a pretext for the introduction of military means, such as no-fly zones, SOF, and airstrikes (Cordesman, 2014). From a Russian view, the West would much prefer a manageable chaos than the stability of an unfriendly tyrant.

These new methods and forms, and hence Gerasimov's theory, cannot be seen as only a theory for how future conflicts will be conducted by Russia but rather should be considered a

descriptive theory of how modern warfare has been developed by the West. His theory can be considered a key motivator behind the changes to Russia's 2014 military doctrine. Russia's de-emphasis on its nuclear arsenal and increased emphasis on conventional assets and nonmilitary methods as guarantors of sovereignty are viewed as essential countermeasures to Western indirect and asymmetric methods of war. The military's new emphasis on nonmilitary means illustrates the primary innovation within the Russian Armed Forces. In addition, it also sheds light on how President Putin viewed the chain of events leading to Ukrainian president Yanukovych's exit, and how he sees current economic and political sanctions that have been levied against the Russian Federation, as new nonmilitary methods and forms of war being directed against Russia (Escobar, 2014).

## RUSSIAN APPLICATION OF INDIRECT AND ASYMMETRIC METHODS

Undoubtedly, at the time of the publication of General Gerasimov's article he had no idea that a chain of events would lead to Russia's annexation of Crimea and activities in eastern Ukraine. However, in March 2014 this theory was put into practice, as Russia focused its instruments of national power on these very activities.

Gerasimov's theory of war presents a new way of conducting war, where warfare is started long before any official acknowledgment, if acknowledged at all. This new way of conducting warfare is preceded by persistent, subtle, and not-so-subtle information operations to shape the area of operations by legitimizing and delegitimizing the various actors in the conflict as needed. These information operations are combined with economic, diplomatic, and other covert activities to weaken enemy resistance. Indeed, the theory is predicated upon the firm belief that regular military forces should be used only as a last resort—and only when their inclusion will result in a clear victory.

This new form of warfare makes it more difficult to distinguish the lines between strategic, operational, and tactical military objectives. All state assets are theoretically enlisted into the fight. Business, economic, information, and even religious assets work in concert with security and military forces to attain the political objective. On paper, this "power-vertical" model looks impressive; the reality is somewhat different. Because command and control is so widely dispersed, relatively minor military activities, such as shooting down a civilian airliner by an errant air defense system, can have great strategic impacts.

Russia's updated theory of warfare can in many ways be attributed to the lessons learned from military conflicts in the post-Soviet era, particularly the conflicts in Chechnya and Georgia. Russian military theorists have also drawn conclusions from U.S. experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as other conflicts. Russian force projection through the application of these new forms and methods will most likely occur in what is often referred to as the *Russkiy Mir* ("Russian world"). This is an important concept for understanding Russia's new theory of war. In other theories, a sovereign state's interests generally stop squarely at the border, but one aspect of the idea of *Russkiy Mir* promotes a belief that the Russian state's national interest extends throughout the Russian information space, even when that information space crosses international borders, as it often does in Russia's near abroad. The concept of *Russkiy Mir* is far more than just an idea that legitimizes Russian action outside of its borders; it also contains a broader concept which transcends language and culture and which outlines a certain Russian

worldview, one which puts an emphasis on the primacy of the state and traditional cultural values instead of the West's emphasis on the individual and ideals of liberal democracy (Kudors, 2010, pp. 2–4). Russia's actions in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine could all be described as occurring in the *Russkiy Mir*.

The Russian playbook (arguably) for force projection in the *Russkiy Mir* has involved a full-court press of the elements of national power, beginning with economic pressure and intense information operations to shape domestic and foreign perceptions. As the information operation campaign ramps up, ethnic Russian separatists, or any other groups in the region with anti-government leanings and pro-Russian sympathies, will be exploited and primed for action. A population of ethnic separatists (either ethnic Russians or those favorably disposed toward Russia) is a key component for facilitating the introduction of follow-on forces, such as Cossacks, volunteers from Russia, private security companies, and undeclared military forces, into the conflict by providing legitimacy as protectors of the aggrieved separatists.

These follow-on forces find a safe haven with the separatists while conducting provocative activities intended to elicit a strong military response from the host government. Eventually, in response to these provocations, the host government deems fit the use of more heavy-handed tactics to suppress these subversive activities. While the host government is struggling to control a downward spiraling security situation, the Russian Federation uses diplomatic, economic, and informational means to pressure and criticize the target government for its handling of the separatists' subversive activities. In most cases, the desired end state is de facto Russian control of separatist-occupied areas. This control is secured by the use of Russian peacekeeping forces, preferably requested by the United Nation or some other multilateral institution, to maintain peace between the separatists and the other Russian-backed forces and the military of the host government. The Russian Federation's vision of future warfare has required Russia to use its military forces in new ways rarely used in Soviet times, such as through the use of undeclared military forces (e.g., "polite people" and "little green men") and peacekeepers. The desire for deniability, an implied requirement for part of Gerasimov's theory, is causing Russia to further develop and consider the development of military means that can provide degrees of separation between their activities and the Russian government. The West often refers to this as "plausible deniability," but in the context of recent Russian activities it might be better termed "absolute deniability," as absolutely any Russian action, no matter how blatant, can be explained away. The denial of Russian military involvement in eastern Ukraine, despite the presence of new Russian military hardware, reports of substantial casualties and funerals for Russian troops, and claims that Russian troops caught fighting are simply "on leave," are examples of Russia's use of "absolute deniability"(McCoy, 2014; Pivovarchuk, 2014; Kostyuchenko, 2014).

## RUSSIAN MILITARY MEANS FOR THE CONDUCT OF INDIRECT AND ASYMMETRIC METHODS

### Undeclared Forces

The most striking aspect of Russia's Crimean campaign was the appearance of "the polite people" and "little green men" on the streets of Crimea. Russia's gambit of deploying undeclared forces into Crimea was undeniably successful. The deniability of such forces

gave Russia sufficient time to secure Crimea and organize elections without suffering the international condemnation that an overt invasion would have brought. Although the initial success of this gambit is not likely to be repeated, undeclared forces are, and will continue to be, an important component in the Russian toolbox (*RIA Novosti*, 2014; Bartles & McDermott, 2014). In the West the term *military* is typically associated with uniformed service members whose primary occupation is warfighting and who serve under ministries (departments) of defense. In Russia the term *military* is applied much more broadly due to the militarization of the police (internal security services) and intelligence services. Uniformed officers and conscripts serve in these organizations just as they serve under the Ministry of Defense. The use of undeclared forces will include not just Ministry of Defense forces but also other forces from Russia's militarized intelligence and security forces. Although in the West the use of undeclared forces would undoubtedly be solely a special operations or intelligence services mission, in the Russian system this is not the case. Russia has had no qualms about utilizing in this capacity elite but non-SOF units, such as the naval infantry and airborne forces (VDV), and even has used conventional line units when deemed necessary.

## Peacekeepers

Russia's use of peacekeepers in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria has taught Russia that the use of military force is considered abhorrent in the international community, but the same use of military force used in the context of peacekeeping is perfectly acceptable and even lauded by the same community. Russia is using peacekeepers, or more accurately the threat of peacekeepers, in eastern Ukraine to temper Ukrainian efforts to crush the ongoing Russian-sponsored insurgencies in Lugansk and Donetsk. Russia's new fascination with peacekeeping has caused a rapid expansion of peacekeeping capabilities within the Russian military.

Traditionally, peacekeeping duties were the sole purview of the VDV, which has one dedicated peacekeeping brigade, the 31st Air Assault Brigade at Ulyanovsk, and dedicated battalions in each of the four airborne divisions. In the past few years Russia has expanded the number of peacekeeping forces by designating dedicated peacekeeping battalions in each of its naval infantry brigades and transitioning the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade in Samara to the first dedicated motorized rifle peacekeeping brigade in the Russian Armed Forces. Currently there are plans for another motorized rifle peacekeeping brigade to be established in Tuva. The designation of "peacekeeping" is considered to be very prestigious in the Russian Armed Forces, as these units receive top-notch personnel and equipment, including the newest and best-armored personnel carriers and unmanned aerial vehicles (Interfax, 2014).

## Cossacks

Historically, the Cossacks were known for being the tsar's enforcers and, somewhat contradictorily, for being free spirits with a long tradition of resistance to established authority. That said, it seems strange that in today's Russia, a country with a rigidly centralized and authoritarian government, a quasi-military organization such as a Cossack unit is being formed and utilized, yet that is very

much the case. In 2005 Russia passed Federal Law 154-FZ, On State Service of the Russian Cossacks, to clarify the Cossacks' legal status and allow them to form paramilitary units to fulfill limited law-enforcement duties. Today's Cossacks are split into 11 region-based organizations, each led by a hetman (general) and usually conducting state-contracted security work. Russian Cossacks have been key players in providing domestic security, such as in the North Caucasus, but they have also been some of the first "boots-on-the-ground" in Transnistria and Ukraine (Sivkov, 2014).

### Private Military Companies

Russia has keenly watched the development of private military companies in the West and is now expressing interest in developing its own private security companies by creating a legal framework to more easily facilitate the operations of these types of forces. Traditionally, Russia has desired to maintain a monopoly on instruments of violence, but new thinking is changing the way this topic is viewed. Although the use of private military companies is in its infancy in Russia, the political advantages of having an undeclared military force with degrees of separation between itself and the Russian government is likely viewed as highly advantageous, as the Russian view of warfare blurs the line between war and peace. The business of private militaries is likely to be one of the few areas of the Russian economy that will be expanding in the next several years (Butina, 2014; *RAPSI News*, 2014).

### Foreign Legionnaires

Russian state Duma deputy Roman Khudyakov has proposed the establishment of a Russian version of the French Foreign Legion in Central Asia. The purpose of such a force would be to fend off potential Islamic militants who could threaten the region as U.S./NATO troops withdraw from Afghanistan; he also mentions the possibility of using such a force to handle the current situation in eastern Ukraine. Although his proposal is unlikely to be implemented in the current Central Asian political environment, in the event of a failed post-Soviet Central Asian state scenario, which is certainly plausible in these states with strong ethnic tensions and no clear paths for the succession of senior leadership, Khudyakov's proposal may become a more attractive idea if Russia finds itself needing to take a more active role in post-Soviet Central Asia (Molotov, 2014).

### Special Operations Forces

In the West, the term *spetsnaz* is often thought of being equivalent to special operations forces, but in Russian the word *special* is used in a very broad way that can indicate the unit has a very narrow area of specialization or is an elite combat unit (Glantz, 1991). Although some Russian *spetsnaz* units may perform approximately the same tasks as Western SOF units, they still have significant doctrinal differences, in that *spetsnaz* units are doctrinally and logistically bound to the conventional ground forces commander by functioning as his eyes and ears. In the Russian system, these assets are controlled by the intelligence staff section.

In early 2013 Russia established a Special Operations Command (Gavrilov, 2013). The significance of this command is that it was not placed under the Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU) but instead under a different staff section. This is a substantial deviation from precedent and suggests this new command will be less involved with reconnaissance and

more involved with direct action, especially because the unit will reportedly have organic aviation and logistics support. There has been little reporting on the activities of its roughly 1,000 personnel, but it is likely the unit is at some level engaged in the current activities in eastern Ukraine (Bartles & McDermott, 2014; Marsh, 2015). Although Russian SOF is new and gaining a higher profile, primacy still remains with the elite conventional forces. In general, many "SOF missions" from a Western perspective are performed by elite Russian units (e.g., VDV, naval infantry, Cossacks) that are not SOF units.

### Information Warriors

The domination of the information domain is seen as an essential in Gerasimov's new theory of war. Development of its cyber capabilities has been an area of interest to Russia for some time. Information warfare, in this context, refers to capabilities to promote and vilify as needed to shape public opinion at home and abroad through traditional mass communications (e.g., television, newspapers, radio) and through additional, newer, personal methods, such as social media. Much as the maneuver commander marshals his forces and practices military deception (*maskirovka*) to favorably shape the area of operations to achieve victory, today's Russia must do the same in the information domain to achieve the same result. Information warfare capabilities are in both the military and nonmilitary spheres of power. Mass communications, such as domestic news outlets and RT.com, which are directed toward foreign audiences, are typically considered a nonmilitary capability. (Russia views RT.com as a countermeasure to CNN.) On a more personal level, Russia has reportedly engaged the services of professional bloggers to promote Russian government viewpoints to shape perceptions. Aside from these obvious attempts to sway perceptions, there are likely more subtle approaches being pondered, such as the sponsorship or development of Russian-favorable NGOs and think tanks. Whatever happens with these activities, undoubtedly Russian information-warfare capabilities will grow substantially in both military and nonmilitary capacities, as there have already been some calls for the establishment of "information troops" in the Russian Armed Forces. The development of military information warfare capabilities and how they are applied to General Gerasimov's theory will be one of the most interesting topics for future researchers (Garmazhapova, 2013; Tabarintsev-Romanov, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Russia's indirect and asymmetric methods are seen as a response and countermeasure to similar methods initially developed in the West. The use of such methods requires a synthesis of all the state's tools for projecting state power. Although the use of all of the state's means to enact an outcome is nothing new for the Soviets/Russians, never before has this effort been so well coordinated and executed. Russia believes that the most likely threat to its sovereignty is no longer a threat that can be deterred with nuclear weapons or a large conscript army, although nuclear deterrence capabilities are still necessary. General Gerasimov's article and the 2014 Russian military doctrine tacitly acknowledge that the greatest threat of regime change comes not from overt military invasion but from a "color revolution" or Arab Spring–like scenario. In the view of many Russian leaders, such a regime change may well be Western sponsored. Russia's theory of warfare requires conventional military forces that can be used in new ways (such as in an

undeclared capacity or as peacekeepers) and has required Russia to look at developing new means (such as implementing an SOF command as well as using Cossacks, private military companies, and foreign legionnaires) to combat the new "Western way of war." Although Russia perceives the development of indirect and asymmetric methods as essential for countering Western aggression, these same means will be equally useful for conducting offensive operations and will allow Russia to conduct war as the West does. In short, Russia's indirect and asymmetric methods should be viewed not as proactive and aggressive but instead as reactive and defensive measures designed to be Russia's response to the new Western way of war.

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# Unfamiliar Connections: Special Forces and Paramilitaries in the Former Yugoslavia

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The study of special forces is dominated by accounts of British and American units. This article, using the case study of the Yugoslav Special Forces in the 1990s and early 2000s, demonstrates how units that developed outside the Anglosphere possess not only a different military function but also distinct cultures and structures. Therefore, when analyzing units that develop outside the Anglosphere, we need to consider new analytical tools and approaches.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, special operations forces, Kosovo, Serbia

On March 12, 2003, at 12:24 p.m. Serbian prime minister Zoran Đinđić approached the Serbian government building to meet with Anna Lindh, the foreign minister of Sweden. He did not make the meeting. At 12:25 p.m. Zvezdan Jovanović, a former paramilitary and special forces lieutenant colonel, shot the Serbian prime minister in the chest. The bullet punctured Đinđić's heart and killed him instantly. The Serbian authorities, after a short investigation, determined that Jovanović had close ties with the Zemun clan, one of the most powerful members of the Serbian mob, and that many of its members maintained active ties with the Unit for Special Operations (Jedinica za specijalne operacije; JSO)—Serbia's most renowned special forces organization. On March 25, 2003, the Serbian authorities disbanded the very unit that was supposed to protect it from internal instability.

This article examines the JSO to demonstrate how traditional definitions of *special forces* do not apply when analyzing its actions. The JSO, unlike Western special operations forces (SOF), had its origins as an internal stabilizing force within the Ministry of the Interior. It grew into an irregular force only when the circumstances of the Yugoslav wars made it a tool of Slobodan Milosević's foreign policy. The Ministry of the Interior's lack of specialization in such matters, however, caused that department to rely on paramilitaries to make up for its institutional shortcomings. Political circumstances dictated, furthermore, that at the end of the conflict the state incorporate the paramilitaries into a special forces unit: the JSO. The fall of the Milosević regime, however, caused the JSO to turn against the government and increasingly involve itself in criminal activities. The JSO's criminal activities ultimately resulted in the government's decision to disband the unit in 2003. While the JSO was quite abnormal from a Western tradition, many elements of its actions are not exceptional outside the Anglosphere and thus

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provide additional insight into how we conceive of special operations forces as a general phenomenon of study (Marsh, Kenny, & Joslyn, 2015).

One of the pressing problems that special forces and the related field of espionage face is that British and American conceptions dominate the field. As Philip H. J. Davies and Kristian C. Gustafson (2013) explain in their edited book, *Intelligence Elsewhere: Spies and Espionage Outside the Anglosphere*, one of the major problems facing intelligence and espionage studies is that the American and British experiences distort analyses of other aspects of the field. This insight is also true, and perhaps even more so, in the study of special operations forces, as Martin Andrew (2015) and Christopher Marsh, James Kiras, and Patricia Blocksome (2015) make clear in their analyses of special forces outside Britain and the United States. Only Spetsnaz, Russia's special forces, have received even a remotely comparable degree of research as the American and British units (Wiffen & Edmonds, 1989; Bukkvoli, 2015). The relative neglect of non-Anglo-American units in the literature results in a skewed perception of special operations forces, their capabilities, and what roles they perform for the states that they serve (Kiras, 2006). While many SOF units draw their intellectual heritage from the British and American forces, and their origins in waging unconventional warfare, this is not a universal rule. In fact, particularly in states with a heritage of authoritarian regimes, special operations forces often possess origins as counter-insurgency and/or counterrevolutionary forces (again, as is the case with Russia's Spetsnaz and China's Special Forces). These states designed these units to preserve their monopoly on force rather than destabilize an enemy regime. Given the current fixation in the literature with SOF's role in counterinsurgency and stability operations, understanding how other states have gone about this process in the past can provide insights into the present and future (Beckett, 2001; Joes, 2006; Mockaitis, 1990). This is not to say these units should serve as a model; Geraint Hughes (2015) ably demonstrated that applying counterinsurgency lessons of the past directly to the present is a process fraught with peril. Instead, how special operations forces responded to various challenges in the past can assist academics in analyzing their contemporary employment.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF YUGOSLAVIA'S SPECIAL FORCES

The development of special operations forces in Yugoslavia has many parallels with other Eastern European Communist regimes, but the country's unique development created several distinct aspects. These peculiarities primarily result from Yugoslavia's experiences in World War II, specifically how the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (later: the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, or LCY) established a successful resistance organization (Pavlowitch, 2008). The Yugoslav resistance, under Josip Broz Tito, managed to tie down significant German and Axis resources and played an important, although still largely contested, role in that war (von Below, 2010; Stahel, 2009). The Communist-led partisans, numbering 800,000 strong by the end of the conflict, were the only leftist resistance organization to turn wartime success into the creation of a state in the postwar period (Jelavich, 1983).

The fact that the Yugoslav Communists developed a legitimate government with only minor Soviet assistance caused them to cultivate a conception of internal stability distinct from the rest of the Eastern Bloc. First, the Yugoslav Communists, having risen to power through an insurgency campaign, were acutely aware of the danger this posed to the state. Correspondingly, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the CPY established one of the strongest

police states in Eastern Europe. Critical to the police state's success was a strong Ministry of the Interior headed by Aleksandar Ranković, one of Tito's closest confidants (Banac, 1988). The Tito–Stalin split in 1948, when the Soviet Union tossed Yugoslavia out of the fraternal Communist camp, reinforced their fears about fifth columnists. The Soviet Union and its allies actively encouraged local Yugoslavs to resist the government in the aftermath of the split, and launched a series of border incidents designed to undermine the regime's domestic appeal (Banac, 1988). The Yugoslav Communists, from this direct appreciation for how insurgency movements could topple regimes, developed a fixation on maintaining internal stability.

The rest of Yugoslav history reemphasized the state's concern about internal security. Internal dissent within Yugoslavia was a recurring theme from the 1960s through 1980s, and it was not limited to one group. In particular, the Croats and Kosovar Albanians were restive throughout the period in question, but so too were the Serbs (Jelavich, 1983). Given that academics commonly portray Serbs as the biggest proponents of the Yugoslav state, the extent to which the Ministry of the Interior and the LCY saw internal threats throughout the country is evident. Tito even removed Aleksandar Ranković because he allegedly promoted Serbia's interests above those of the federation (Jelavich, 1983). The Ministry of the Interior, given the extent of internal dissent within the country, developed two interrelated yet mutually supportive groups to maintain internal security: special forces units and paramilitary operatives.

There is little discussion of the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior special forces in the literature on special operations forces. This oversight is primarily because the Ministry of the Interior's units do not fit the traditional Anglo-American conception of special operations forces. The Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior special forces performed counterinsurgency operations and fought insurgents in Yugoslavia's dissident regions and republics. This usage was most notable in Kosovo after the 1981 protests (Petrovic & Stefanović, 2010; Jović, 2009). The Kosovo protests, started by Kosovar Albanians due to the economic backwardness of the region, quickly spiraled into militant action, and the president of Yugoslavia declared a state of emergency and dispatched 30,000 additional troops to the region. Ministry of the Interior special forces significantly supported these soldiers (Udovicki & Ridgeway, 2000). The soldiers quickly put down the official protests, but Kosovo remained in a state of undeclared unrest for the remainder of its existence within Yugoslavia.

The Ministry of the Interior's involvement in Kosovo, and its units' active role in maintaining state authority, caused that department to increasingly identify with the (relatively) loyal Serb minority over the Albanian majority (Udovicki & Ridgeway, 2000). This outlook meant that by the time that the Yugoslav state fragmented in 1991 the Ministry of the Interior came to align itself with the pro-Serbian leadership of Milosević. Not only did Milosević claim that he worked to save the Yugoslav state but his ideology increasingly mirrored that of the Ministry of the Interior special forces after their 10-year battle to maintain order in Kosovo (Lebor, 2003). The strain of the conflict upon the Ministry of the Interior, in other words, caused it to view Milosević's vague promises of maintaining the Yugoslav state as congruent with its own ideology of state order.

The other component of the Ministry of the Interior's coercive control that was separated from the regular special forces was the groups of contractors who performed targeted assassinations. The Ministry of the Interior employed these individuals, in particular, to eliminate émigrés they deemed dangerous to the state. Yugoslavia, although popularly perceived as the "friendly" Communist country (due to its nonaligned status), was as ruthless, if not more so, than the other Communist

regimes in this regard. The Ministry of the Interior's ruthlessness was due to its underlying culture of fear concerning internal dissent. The number of people that the Yugoslav secret police (UDBA) assassinated is still unknown, but it is, at the very least, extensive (Spasic, 2001).

Critically, for the purposes of this article, one of the Ministry of the Interior's most successful operatives was Željko Ražnatović (Horvitz & Catherwood, 2009). Ražnatović, later known as Arkan, immigrated to Western Europe in the 1970s and, although primarily a petty criminal, was occasionally contracted by the UDBA to perform sensitive operations for the Yugoslav state. Close ties with Stane Dolanc, the Yugoslav minister of the interior and Akan's guardian during his youth, resulted in Arkan becoming a critical asset; Dolanc allegedly stated, "One Arkan is worth more than the whole UDBA" (Shentov, 2004). While Dolanc's history with Arkan certainly resulted in a biased opinion, it demonstrates the linkages that existed between the criminal and the official that formed a key part of the Ministry of the Interior's counterinsurgency doctrine in the Yugoslav wars.

Arkan cannot be considered a member of the special forces; he was a hired thug and assassin. Nevertheless, Arkan served as a nexus between the Ministry of the Interior and the criminal underworld of Yugoslav society. Despite the fact Arkan was arrested on several occasions, he frequently broke out of prison with the assistance of the UDBA. That the Ministry of the Interior considered him an asset rather than a threat can be seen by the fact that, on his return to Yugoslavia, Arkan obtained a job as head of security for Red Star Belgrade, the largest soccer firm in Yugoslavia (Lebor, 2003). Red Star Belgrade's supporter firm, the Delije ("Heroes"), was closely associated with Serb nationalism ("Football, Blood, and War," 2004). Arkan, in other words, was put in direct contact with a large number of disaffected youth with military training (Horncastle, 2011). Arkan helped sow the grounds for the merger between the Ministry of the Interior's special forces and the paramilitary element.

Arkan's eventual role as head of one of the most dangerous paramilitary units in the Yugoslav wars points to a fundamental difference between Anglo-American special operations forces and those developed in Yugoslavia: The tension that exists between espionage and special operations forces was considerably less in Yugoslavia than in the West. One of the major sources of tension in American operations since the Afghan invasion had been in the chain of command that exists between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. military's special operations forces. While there are many parallels between U.S. special forces (e.g., Green Berets) and CIA Wet teams, the overlap between the two created tensions regarding operational responsibilities (Scahill, 2013). In Yugoslavia, this distinction did not exist because the two groups were placed directly under the Ministry of the Interior. This allowed the two to operate in conjunction in ways that have proven difficult for U.S. units (Davenport, 2014). The Yugoslav military possessed its own special forces branch, which we briefly examine later, but the Ministry of the Interior possessed capabilities that allowed them to ignore the military through the employment of its own units. While the distinctions between the CIA and the U.S. military serve important legal requirements, it is important to note that such a distinction is a conscious political decision, and that other states may not make it.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE PARAMILITARIES

The Yugoslav wars that occurred in 1991 threw into question the Ministry of the Interior's role in the state and challenged the very reason for its existence. As Slovenia, Croatia, and other

republics made plans to break away from Yugoslavia, the Ministry of the Interior faced the same problem as the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) in that it faced the failure of its guiding ideology (Hadžić, 2002). The Ministry of the Interior, however, was more handicapped than the JNA in its ability to challenge the succession of the dissident republics. Milosević's government could—and did—claim that the JNA acted on its own accord and that the department was not responsible for JNA's actions. This was a blatant lie; Milosević's government was intimately involved in the JNA's actions. But the army's status as a federal organ, and Milosević simply being the head of a republic, allowed him to deny culpability, even if it was not plausible (Hadžić, 2002). Serbia and Montenegro's declaration of the Federal Yugoslav Republic (FRY) on April 28, 1992, and their absorption of the armed forces meant that JNA lost its plausible deniability. This development resulted in the formerly problematic Ministry of the Interior paramilitaries becoming the primary means for the Milosević government to pursue its foreign policy objectives after the FRY's formation due to their plausible deniability.

The Ministry of the Interior's ideology during this period also changed, from supporters of the Yugoslav state to one advancing a Serb conception of the state. In part, this was due to the close overlap that existed between the Serbian Ministry of the Interior and the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior. By 1990, Mihalj Kertes, former deputy head of the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior, was made a Serb minister without portfolio. He was instrumental, as Tim Judah (2000) notes, in preparing the insurgency campaign among Croatian Serbs. Interestingly, this development is actually in line with the original doctrinal purpose of U.S. Special Forces: the destabilization of an enemy regime through the use of unconventional warfare (Bank, 1986; Paddock, 2002). The critical difference, however, was that Kertes and the Ministry of the Interior, both Yugoslav and Serb, used the special forces against their fellow citizens. Thus while the tactics between American/British special forces and the Yugoslav/Serbian Ministries of the Interior were similar, their objectives and strategic goals were not.

One of the main ways that the Yugoslav/Serbian Ministries of the Interior sought to accomplish their task was through the employment of paramilitary forces. The Ministry of the Interior trained the paramilitaries that would become infamous in the Yugoslav wars as a means of pursuing its aggressive foreign policy while the state formally maintained its distance. Two principal units demonstrate how the Ministry of the Interior accomplished this task: Arkan's Tigers and the White Eagles. Arkan, as mentioned, possessed both the criminal and social connections needed to form a group of armed men around him. Arkan formed the Tigers on October 11, 1990, by recruiting individuals from the Delije, Red Star Belgrade's supporter firm. The Ministry of the Interior's special forces almost immediately began training Arkan's Tigers in counterinsurgency tactics (Malcolm, 1996). Arkan's Tigers eventually grew to approximately 1,000 individuals. The Ministry of the Interior realized the group's potential and used it to combat Croatian and Bosnian military units, as well as to ethnically cleanse regions it deemed Serb, in pursuit of the FRY's political objectives (Zakbar, 1995). Demonstrative of Arkan's close links with Milosević's government was the fact he was elected as a member of parliament for Kosovo.

Critically, while Arian's Tigers performed the Ministry of the Interior's orders, the group simultaneously established its own criminal enterprise. In fact, Arkan's Tigers was, in many ways, a shadow government in Serbia proper. During the period when the FRY was under economic sanction, Arkan's ice cream parlor became the main contact point for both exchanging foreign currency as well as acquiring items that were hard to get in Belgrade (Kaldor, 2012). The

group's ability to operate outside of Serbia while performing operations for the Ministry of the Interior gave it a distinct advantage over other criminal organizations at smuggling contraband. This close association between paramilitaries and Serbia's criminal underbelly continued once they were formally incorporated into the state's special forces.

The White Eagles differed from Arkan's Tigers in that the group was led by Vojislav Šešelj. Šešelj, unlike Arkan, did not possess a background as an agent of the Ministry of the Interior; Šešelj actually had been one of Yugoslavia's leading academics on insurgency theory (Horncastle, 2015). In fact, Šešelj, unlike Arkan, did not possess a criminal background, except for pro-Serb political activities in which he was involved in the 1980s and early 1990s. Šešelj's political activities culminated in him founding the Serbian Radical Party. These activities, in the new political climate, made Šešelj a patriot rather than a criminal. Šešelj's newfound legitimacy caused Yugoslav counterintelligence services to engineer his appointment as commander of the White Eagles after Mirko Jović, the previous commander, lost effective control of the unit by late 1991 (Šešelj, 2005). The Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior and its associates in counter-intelligence, in other words, worked to guarantee that not only were their paramilitaries disrupting the Slovenian, Croatian, and Bosnian states but that they served the political imperatives of the Yugoslav government in Belgrade.

The paramilitaries, despite their extremist ideology and willingness to use whatever tactics were necessary to succeed, were ultimately unable to prevent the separation of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina from Yugoslavia. That said, the paramilitaries, and their Ministry of the Interior handlers, helped create a new state ethos in Yugoslavia. This new ethos did away with the *Bratstvo i Jedinstvo* ("Brotherhood and Unity") of the Yugoslav era and replaced it with a Serb-centric ideology (Malesevic, 2013). The problem that the new regime faced, however, was that it could not trust the previous guardians of the old order: the JNA's replacement, the Yugoslav Army (Judah, 2000). Instead, Milosević drew on elements that had proven loyal to him in his efforts to cement his personal control of Yugoslavia: the Ministry of the Interior and its paramilitary allies.

The year 1996 marked the culmination in the relationship between the paramilitaries, special forces, and the Ministry of the Interior as the FRY formed the Unit for Special Operations (JSO). The signing of the Dayton Accords, which ended the Yugoslav wars, meant that Milosević's regime no longer possessed a foreign theater through which to export what were now its most troublesome elements: the paramilitaries (Hoare, 2004). Milosević was left with a single option: he integrated the paramilitaries into the Ministry of the Interior, thereby creating the Unit for Special Operations (JSO).

The JSO completed the symbiosis between the paramilitaries and traditional special forces of the Yugoslav regime. The Ministry of the Interior, whose original concern was with preserving the privileges and position of the CPY, transformed into an entity devoted to protecting the regime of Milosević. The tactics, including assassination of potential dissidents, up to and including the assassination of the now-out-of-favor Arkan in 2000 by criminal elements affiliated with the JSO and Ministry of the Interior for his opposition to Milosević, demonstrated that the means had not changed, only the targets ("Arkan Dead," 2000). Whereas the Ministry of the Interior in Communist Yugoslavia was ironically primarily concerned with enemies living outside the state, the flimsy nature of personal dictatorships and the now invalidation of Milosević's title as defender of Serbs outside Serbia proper meant that the government needed to both construct and eliminate internal enemies to justify its actions. Fortunately for Milosević, the state relied on an old "threat" to justify their existence: Kosovar Albanians.

As the FRY faced economic stagnation and political uncertainty in the aftermath of its failed efforts in the Yugoslav wars, the restive nature of Kosovo provided a convenient scapegoat for Milosević and the Ministry of the Interior to redirect Serb nationalist sentiment. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a Kosovar Albanian nationalist organization, began active operations against the Yugoslav state starting in 1996 ("Unknown Albanian 'Liberation Army' Claims Attacks," 1996). Although the Yugoslav authorities, in response to the KLA's attacks, increased police presence in the region, the tactic ultimately backfired and lent further legitimacy to the uprising. This conflict ultimately culminated in the Kosovar war, fought between February 28, 1998, and June 11, 1999 (Judah, 2002). Although Yugoslav authorities initially focused on eliminating the KLA, and the JSO was at the forefront of these efforts, their actions eventually devolved into ethnic cleansing and, arguably, genocide (*Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo*, 2001). We won't know for certain the exact details of the unit's activities in Kosovo until the archives are unsealed, but by most indications they were at the forefront of the war crimes being committed in the region (*Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo*, 2001). The JSO's unique skills, and institutional legacies, made them ideally suited for the task.

## SPECIAL FORCES AND INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The combination of the Serbian paramilitaries and the former special forces units gets at one of the critical issues facing special operations research: the importance of institutional culture to these units' performance. In the case of institutional culture, the JSO in Kosovo carried out the same mission types that the Ministry of the Interior previously performed in Communist Yugoslavia. The distinction, however, was that the units applied the ruthless tactics they had learned as paramilitaries to their operations in Kosovo. The Ministry of the Interior maintained its initial culture, but it adopted the brutal methods of the former paramilitaries to further its own ends.

The Kosovo campaign was the most blatant example of the JSO using previous training to further the Ministry of the Interior's goals. They also exploited another important legacy— their criminal associations—to eliminate Milosević's enemies within Serbia proper. On October 3, 1999, criminal elements targeted Serbian Renewal Movement officials, at time one of the largest Milosević opposition organizations in Yugoslavia. The culprits killed several key members of the party and wounded the party's president, Vuk Drašković. In 2007, the culprits' trial confirmed that Milorad Ulemek, a former state security official, and four JSO members were responsible for the attack ("Ibarska Murder Trial Before Supreme Court," 2008). Ironically, Drašković was an associate of Šešelj, the early paramilitary leader. The Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution, the name for Milosević's rise to power, consumed its own children. The JSO was the Milosević regime's principal tool in this objective.

Critical to the JSO was that, institutionally, its culture was inherently weak due to its predication on the personal rule of Milosević. Without Milosević to regulate the system, the elements of society that had previously relied on him to justify their positions were without a cause or purpose. Milosević's government created the JSO with the clear purpose of defending Milosević's regime; Milosević's loss of power in 2000 made this ideology obsolete.

While Serbian society adjusted to the new political regime, the praetorians of the old regime found the transition much more difficult. One symptom of the JSO's increased detachment from

the changing political culture in Serbia was its association with criminal enterprises. The JSO, through the paramilitaries' pre-Yugoslav war criminal connections, had always been associated with the criminal elements in Yugoslav society. In fact, in some of its missions, such as the attempted assassination of Drašković, they co-opted criminals to support their efforts ("Ibarska Murder Trial Before Supreme Court," 2008). Milosević's close association with Yugoslavia's criminal underside, in fact, encouraged such connections between the JSO and Yugoslavia's mafia (Stevanovic, 2004). While this action was sustainable so long as Milosević was in power, the new governments' efforts to challenge the Serbian Mafia's influence in society further distanced the JSO from the regime. Milosević's praetorians, in other words, were ready for a palace coup.

The tensions between the JSO and the political establishment culminated in the assassination of Đinđić in 2003. Although Jovanović was the sole former member of the JSO who participated in the assassination, the increased ties between it and criminal elements in society caused the Serbian government grave concern. Fear that Đinđić was the first of many led to the Serbian government's decision to disband the unit on March 25, 2003 ("Serbia Disbands Police Unit of Suspect in Prime Minister's Death," 2003). The praetorians of the old order were too much of a threat to the new for the government to allow their continued existence.

The dissolution of JSO did not rob Serbia of its special forces. Instead, Serbia redirected resources away from the Ministry of the Interior toward traditional special forces units under the control of the military. In 2006, the Serbian armed forces centralized the various special forces units into the Specijalna Brigade (SB). The units that composed the new SB (72nd Special Brigade, 63rd Paratrooper Brigade, the Cobra anti-terrorist squad, and elements of the 82nd Marine Center) performed many of the functions of what in the Western world we consider special operations forces. In fact, all these units have comparable units in the U.S. Armed Forces. While they existed throughout the Yugoslav wars and the post-Milosević era, the fact that they were direct military units made their utility in foreign theaters questionable, in that Milosević would not be able to claim plausible deniability. The SB units were furthermore suspect against domestic entities, as Milosević did not completely trust the JNA or its successor.

## CONCLUSIONS

While Serbia's special forces are now developing along Western lines, it remains to be seen what legacies the JSO and the Ministry of the Interior's experiment with paramilitaries will have in the country. Throughout the 1990s, Yugoslavia's special forces primary interest was in preserving the privileges of their patron, Slobodan Milosević. Milosević's fall from power, however, threw this ideology into question, which caused the Special Forces to increasingly rely upon their criminal contacts to maintain the status and position that they acquired under the Serbian dictator. Đinđić's attempt to eliminate the Serbian mob's influence in his country, however, forced the criminals to rely on the one element that could maintain their position: the JSO. The JSO's blatant complicity in Đinđić's assassination, however, caused Serbia to disband the unit and reemphasize the military special forces that Milosević had largely neglected.

Although this analysis was only a brief examination of the JSO, it raises several pertinent questions about the employment of special forces. In particular, it demonstrates the limitations of an Anglo-American-centric focus to the study of special operations and SOF. The Yugoslav

Special Forces, because of the country's unique history with countersinsurgency and placement under the Ministry of the Interior, were significantly different from U.S. and British forces. While Yugoslavia still possessed what we consider "regular" special forces, the Yugoslav state's fear of internal dissidents, particularly after the early 1950s' fears of external invasion abated, caused them to focus on those under the Ministry of the Interior. The Serbian government disbanded the JSO, but the questions it raises about how we percieve of Special Forces remains pertinent today.

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# Special Operations and Design Thinking: Through the Looking Glass of Organizational Knowledge Production

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The U.S. military over the past decade has developed various forms of "design thinking" for complex problem solving in military conflicts. U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has recently developed two operational design and design practitioners courses in an effort to integrate design thinking across all levels of USSOCOM. While the conventional Army uses one form of design, the organizational composition, mission, and high level of tacit knowledge production requires special operations to pursue other design concepts, design education options, and organizational improvements. This article outlines how and why special operations needs a different organizing philosophy for design in context, where the unique qualities of special operation missions require designing differently than conventional approaches.

Keywords: design, tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge, sociology, complexity, organizational theory, special operations, paradigms, ontology

U.S. special operations forces (SOF) represent the most technologically advanced, best resourced, and most combat experienced force of professional soldiers on this planet. With those accolades, does there really need to be a discussion on how the special operations organization approaches thinking, thinking about thinking (metacognition), and problem solving in complexity? Shouldn't the other attributes simply bowl over complexity and defeat our adversaries through sheer technological and professional overmatch, as our National Security Strategy and recent Army future operating concept indirectly suggest (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2014; U.S. White House, 2015)?[1] As the recent unresolved conflicts in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and elsewhere seem to run against this logic, we might consider how and why special operations as an organization is currently unable to gain a true cognitive overmatch against adversaries, particularly in organizational knowledge production and creative problem solving within complex contexts.

Recently, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), the hierarchical juggernaut in the special operations community, launched new initiatives in military design thinking through several education programs at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU).[2] While the U.S. military has already struggled with implementing design through doctrine, education, and practice, this

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latest initiative is important for several factors (Murden, 2013). First, USSOCOM acknowledges the importance of distinguishing design thinking from subsequent planning. Design alone is not planning, and planning alone is not design (Joint Staff, J-7 Joint and Coalition Warfighting, 2011; Zweibelson, 2015).[3] The U.S. Army as an institution continues to wrestle with this issue, while USSOCOM seems to be advancing beyond it (Banach & Ryan, 2009; Graves & Stanley, 2013; Grigsby et al., 2011).[4] Second, USSOCOM realizes that existing design doctrine and approved methodologies are incomplete, still evolving in form and function, and may not be entirely compatible with the unique nature of special operations missions, composition, resources, and perspectives. It is in this second transition where the special operations community is positioned to make exceptional advances (while also risking dangerous false trajectories) in organizational knowledge production and complex problem solving.

Despite methodological quibbles over "this version of design methodology" or "that approach to operational design" concepts, USSOCOM has deeper philosophical and paradigmatic challenges for design. A paradigm is "the broadest unit of consensus within a science and serves to differentiate one scientific community from another. It subsumes, defines, and interrelates the exemplars, theories, methods and instruments that exist within in" (Rizer, 1980, p. 7; Kuhn, 1996, pp. 5–15). For design thinking to take the best course for a tailored special operations organization and mission outlook, we need to consider several significant sociological and philosophical concepts on how we make sense of complexity and convey this understanding to others.

This is an article about "thinking about how the special operations community thinks about complexity" (or metacognition upon the organization) and why these cognitive distinctions require significantly dissimilar design approaches than what the general purpose forces now pursues. This requires a trip down the rabbit hole that demands critical reflection and a willingness to creatively replace outdated institutionalisms with novel and unexpected (surprising) adaptations.

## DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE: SOCIOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICALTHEORIES ON KNOWLEDGE

The past five decades of sociological and philosophical advancement have ushered in profound new ways of understanding human cognition, knowledge production, and organizational theory. While various scientific and philosophical fields and disciplines continue to debate many of these theories, enough momentum has been generated behind the study of paradigms to provide great value to the military. For special operations as well as the entire military profession, dealing with complex problems is now the new normal while traditional (and still highly coveted) linear approaches to classic warfare may be less likely to occur, in that adversaries are becoming increasingly capable and elusive (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2014, pp. 15–16; U.S. White House, 2015, p. 4). Our adversaries now avoid fighting us where we are traditionally strong, and they continue to adapt novel and emergent approaches that exploit our weaknesses. Institutionally, we tend to misunderstand much of this and routinely attempt to "force the system" to behave the way we wish it would.

The military prefers what sociologists term a *functionalist paradigm*, where the world is systematic, reducible through scientific approaches, measurements, and repeatable linear

processes (Bousquet, 2009, pp. 56–60; Guerlac, 1986, p. 67; Tsoukas, 2005, p. 171). Regarding the term *systematic*, we take a reductionist approach to complexity, where the whole can be addressed after understanding the nature of individual components that might later be reassembled back into the larger complexity. This underlies a majority of military planning models, such as how we break down analysis into steps, groups, domains, levels, and generalized structures that are labeled with doctrinal friendly acronyms. The scientific method, applied in a blend of military and technological weighted choices and values, underpins this functionalist approach to understanding warfare, military strategy, and organizational approaches in conflicts.

Once a "law" is verified by pseudoscientific military applications, it becomes universal and timeless; the characteristics of mass, surprise, speed, or economy of effort are applicable in every conflict with just the right combination and analysis (Tsoukas & Dooley, 2011, p. 730). Every conflict might also be divided and understood if our staffs correctly dissected complexity into political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information (PMESII) "bins," framed into the DIME (democracy, information, military, economics) model or other useful models (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012, p. 5; U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011, p. I–4).[5]

At this ontological level (the "what is/what is not" knowledge level), we make deep and implicit decisions regarding the fundamental nature of reality, upon which we construct our problem-solving approaches and how we choose *not* to interpret reality (Hatch & Yanow, 2008, pp. 24–30; Reed, 2005, p. 1623; Stark, 1958, p. 13). Functionalism embraces an objectivist outlook on reality, where at the ontological level we know that the world must be constant (Conklin, 2008; Schon, 1992b, pp. 4–11; Taleb, 2007, p. 16; Weick, 2004, p. 42). Objectivism means that all of the observable as well as conceptual things in reality exist in some form. Further, we as observers might remove ourselves from the equation and apply scientific methods that reveal universal laws these objects will always obey in some regard. This forms the basis for propositional knowledge, a key hallmark of the functionalist military perspective (Tsoukas, 2005, pp. 70–71).

Although there are alternatives to the functionalist paradigm, nearly all Western military organizations rely exclusively on functionalism to make sense of complexity in military contexts. Design provides cognitive tools for breaking out of this single-paradigm thinking, and special operations design requires it, as we expand on further (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Lewis & Grimes, 1999; Schultz & Hatch, 1996, pp. 673–675). Change and organization are intrinsically related; how an organization changes relates to what defines the beliefs, habits, and experiences (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 570). Thus, special operations and general purpose forces are not interchangeable. However, another important distinction on knowledge needs to be illustrated next, as it becomes a powerful organizing force for how special operations should (and should not) pursue design approaches in practice, education, and doctrinal transformation.

## A MAD TEA PARTY: SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND TACIT OVER EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE

Donald Schon wrote extensively on the sociological premise that organizational knowledge might be split between tacit and explicit forms. Knowledge that is tacit (i.e., very hard to explain) appears in tension with knowledge that is explicit (i.e., very easy to teach, list, or convey) (Gondo & Amis, 2013, p. 232; Schon, 1992a, p. 243). Explicit knowledge is akin to what can easily be put into a list of

directions, a checklist, or transmitted to another person so that he or she reliably and easily gains that knowledge. Unlike explicit knowledge that takes form in our instructions, guides, and doctrine, tacit knowledge occurs within high skill sets and is often impossible to clearly describe or explain to another. Consider how master artists, professional athletes, and highly skilled professionals are unable to articulate how they do the impressive things that define their excellence. Granted, this is not an either/or categorization; rather, this is one of several ways of considering how organizations construct knowledge over time. Returning to the military context, we do have valid categories for what is militarily explicit and what we might consider tacit military knowledge.

In 1966, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, taking a largely nonfunctionalist perspective within the interpretivist paradigm, wrote *The Social Construction of Reality*, where they discussed, among many things, the concepts of "recipe knowledge" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Baudrillard, 2001; Kinsella, 2006, p. 279). In their explanation of different types of recipe knowledge, Berger and Luckmann discuss how organizations "attempt to transfer practical abilities or 'knowhow' from a skilled or knowledgeable performer to a novice. This occurs by offering step-by-step direction in terms that are familiar" (in Shaffer, 2010, p. 56). Sociologist Leigh Shaffer (2010) expanded on the Berger and Luckmann distinction by working with the earlier knowledge research of Alfred Schütz (from whom Berger and Luckmann drew) and identified the ontological tension between "simple recipes" and "standardized recipes" as a relationship concerning tacit and explicit knowledge goals.

The simple recipe works, as Shaffer (2010) described, as a rule-of-thumb approach, where highly skilled performers rely on tacit knowledge to convey practices in an adaptive act (pp. 57–59). Thus, the highly skilled performers offer incomplete and inadequate descriptions in a highly artistic, fluid, and context-dependent format. A professional baseball pitcher offering another elite athlete some rules of thumb on his slider might qualify as a useful example. A special forces operator who is training host nation special operations forces to target and execute raids is yet another. Sometimes we cannot explain it at all and instead demonstrate it, like a fine artist or athlete that is operating "in the zone." Those who also possess similar tacit knowledge tend to grasp new rules of thumb easier, while novices can get overwhelmed quickly or lost and demand more explicit and simplified explanations.

Unlike simple recipes that rely on tacit knowledge and rules of thumb between highly skilled performers, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) standardized recipes seek explicit, step-by-step procedures to eliminate the need for tacit knowledge in performers and reduce reliance on highly skilled users. While standardized recipes work effectively in simplistic, routine, and closed systems, they have a demonstrated reliability that works well in organizations relying on less skilled performers who must conduct many simplistic tasks in uniform and predictable manners (Welsh & Dehler, 2012, p. 777). Unlike professional baseball pitchers relying on their tacit abilities and flexible yet incomplete rules of thumb, our explicit performers are more like a senior mechanic training a group of new mechanics on the basic sequences of conducting an oil change. Once trained, these new mechanics will operate in multiple locations where a diverse number of vehicles will require oil servicing.

Afghan logisticians trained to maintain property and supply chains are another example, where Coalition logisticians implement simplistic and streamlined procedures for them to follow. The standardized recipes transmit easily into sequenced performances and are maintained by recipe books that might detail the different adjustments by make, model, and year of automobile. Regardless of the vehicle that needs servicing, the organization reduces the need for tacit knowledge by standardizing explicit knowledge construction to accomplish problem solving.

Complexity and human conflict contexts are not the same as throwing a perfect slider or changing the oil in a Buick. Instead, they present adaptive and confusing patterns of emergent system behavior where some things might require tacit knowledge and other more routine tasks demand explicit approaches only. For special operations and design approaches, it is this ratio of tacit to explicit that drives the ontological structure for a proper design construct. Special operations—by nature of the mission, skill set of performers, dissimilated and decentralized approach in unconventional warfare and foreign assistance, and the extensive demands for dynamic, comprehensive problem-solving approaches—leans toward the tacit end of the knowledge production spectrum. Clearly, special operations has a deep foundation of explicit and sequential tasks where standardized recipes are the only necessary component, yet these also likely do not require much design emphasis.

For design approaches, special operations is decidedly unlike operations of general purpose forces in that the high-performance users operate under largely tacit knowledge processes. The rule-of-thumb approach that cannot be accomplished via explicit or standardized methodologies prevents special operations from simply plucking current design doctrine out of the larger Army institution and perhaps slapping a "special operations" title to the front of it. SOF design will not function effectively for the needs of the organization by simply borrowing general purpose methodologies.

Proponents of general purpose forces might object to the generalization that SOF has a high tacit-to-explicit ratio of performers and general purpose forces, the opposite. Clearly, many conventional performers express high tacit knowledge, and there are many examples of SOF explicit performances identical to general purpose practices. Over those objections, one might consider the force structures of SOF versus conventional organizations. While special operations builds around decentralized teams of highly trained (tacit) performers, the general purpose force has a far larger "pyramid base" of privates, junior officers, and explicit performance requirements across much larger, centralized organizations (Rothstein, 2007, p. 290). Although the leadership exhibits just as much tacit and experienced performances, general purpose forces are still structured toward reducing tacit knowledge requirements for the majority of the general purpose organization (Bousquet, 2009, p. 56; Romjue, 1997, p. 11; Tsoukas, 2005, p. 171). This does not occur in special operations; rather the opposite appears to be routine. Smaller groups of highly skilled and trained individuals function in a greater decentralized and flexible process where adaptation and unique, tailored approaches are realized more frequently than standardized, uniform routines (Madden et al., 2014).[6] One should therefore not seek a special operations design approach that shares the same framework, language, and institutional justification of the other. Design for general purpose forces aims toward an entirely dissimilar way of building and maintaining organizational knowledge. If SOF design is not like "Big Army" design, then what should it look like?

## INVISIBLE CHESHIRE CATS "GRIN"ING: FUTURE SPECIAL OPERATIONS INVESTMENTS

One of the strongest seductions on where SOF design ought to move revolves around the special operations community and organizational theory. Sociologist Karl Weick (1993) addressed the institutional forces within an organization confronted by looming disasters and unexpected

developments, in that organizations tend to stubbornly hold to existing cognitive processes as they outstrip their past experiences (p. 636). For special operations (and the rest of Western military forces), technology has unfortunately become a powerfully blinding tool that resists and rejects critical reflection and promises utopian dreams of certainty, predictability, and greater control of complexity (Bousquet, 2008a, pp. 917–919). Owing in a large way to the deep historical trend of technology paired with military science since the era of McNamara's Whiz Kids and the Vietnam period, technology and science have been an instrumental part of special operations' organizational consciousness (Bousquet, 2008b; Edwards, 1996, pp. 127–128; Rothstein, 2007, p. 97). The acronym GRIN addresses the budding fields of genetics, robotics, information technology, and nanotechnology—all of which feature prominently in special operations research and development (Pudas & Drapeau, 2009, p. 63). While advanced technology is undoubtedly important and instrumental to many special operations organizational actions, it does not necessarily trump how SOF design and complex problem solving ought to function.

Technology is reliant on explicit knowledge in that, while there surely is art and creativity in developing new technological ideas and applications, the execution of technology in the hands of the user is a largely explicit and standardized process. Novel and emergent technology, of course, begins with tacit creativity. The difference is profound yet blurred. For design thinking, special operations is tempted by greater technological solutions to potentially standardize design thinking into advanced computer modeling, and quantitative metrics. We are persuaded by elaborate human terrain targeting algorithms, and other pseudoscientific endeavors that essentially mirror the standardized recipe process to reduce the need for tacit knowledge performers. This is not a call for a moratorium on investing in future GRIN technology; it is a caution over seeking SOF design approaches that are exclusively reliant on explicit knowledge production within the organization. An overreliance on GRIN may leave special operations with a toothless smile when confronting the next emergent complex conflict. Further, there are other risks as well for special operations due to the overarching military institution and the centralized hierarchical jabberwocky that drives military education, doctrine, practices, and organization.

## "WHY IS A RAVEN LIKE A WRITING DESK?" AND OTHER SPECIAL OPERATIONS RIDDLES[7]

The U.S. Army incorporated initial design theory into Field Manual 5.0 (*The Operations Process*) in 2010 (Ryan, 2011). Since then, the Army has struggled to effectively execute design within the force, triggering multiple studies and research into why the organization is unable to work design into planning. In 2012, the U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences reported that design was considered by some in the military as "dense, elitist, and inaccessible to the masses" and that there were a series of organizational barriers preventing the Army from integrating design into existing traditional planning practices (Grome, Crandall, & Rasmussen, 2012, pp. 1–32). Since that report, the Army has retooled design into "Army design methodology" and launched additional studies—still without much success (Banach & Ryan, 2009; Murden, 2013; Zweibelson, 2015; Zweibelson, Martin, & Paparone, 2013, p. 23). Concurrently, Joint Forces maintain "operational design" concepts while teasing in some elements of Army design, while other services pursue other interpretations (Banach & Ryan,

2009; Joint Staff, J-7 Joint and Coalition Warfighting, 2011, pp. 10–11; Murden, 2013, p. 106). Meanwhile, special operations has tangled with design and produced mixed results as well as great debate within the SOF community on what design even means and whether it matters for the organization (Martin, 2011, 2015).

In the story of *Alice in Wonderland*, the riddle of the "raven and the writing desk" discusses deeper philosophical notions of organization, identity, time, and the cycle of life and death.[7] An adaptation of this riddle applies to this important design debate: How does a special operations complex problem relate to the special operations organization? SOF performers cannot confuse the different problem frames within complex conflict contexts with those of the conventional force, nor should it confuse a design approach that organizes around a tacit organization with one that capitalizes on reducing tacit performers.

Big Army has crafted (and re-crafted) design approaches into yet another standardized recipe within doctrine and the practice of Mission Command where design works largely in explicit step-by-step procedures and tacit performance is reduced. Instead of developing larger and deeper explanations on design, doctrine continues to reduce and streamline design methodologies into shorter chapters composed of universal and oversimplified terms and language. The result is that, for the general purpose force, a larger and larger group of design practitioners can now reliably produce the same largely explicit outputs while using a more generalized and simplistic design approach. While this continues to work for simplistic and closed systems, the adaptive and emergent complex conflict contexts with which we routinely find our forces struggling categorically reject simplistic design efforts.

Special operations might easily latch onto existing design doctrine, concepts, and merely build additional add-ons to the framework to make some SOF design jabberwocky that meets the expectations of conformity and larger institutional pressures. Special operations might also engage in layering greater technological applications upon this, casting the illusion that with more data and faster processes of many things, we might gain some cognitive overmatch over our adversaries. Either of these approaches alone becomes problematic.

Special operations works in a highly tacit-to-explicit ratio for organization as well as military action. As "doing SOF design" necessitates highly skilled designers performing tacit processes, special operations design education must mirror the tacit performer model instead of the shorter and standardized explicit performer approach. Design education cannot be compressed into short and highly standardized modules where special operations students receive explicit design concepts. Output cannot be equated to immediate responsiveness where the organization sends personnel to a week-long course and expects quick results. Instead, special operations design education needs to mirror the long-term operator development glide path. SOF designers require lengthy and cumulative design developments where organizational benefits might not be observed until years after a leader approves a course. Special operations leaders need to consider design education as a major organizational investment and manage designers individually and in a tailored manner that cumulatively builds on multiple design developments.

For design in particular, special operations should avoid the general purpose focused "Army design methodology" model. At a minimum, SOF designers should add an organizational frame as a critical precursor to any SOF design endeavors. This SOF organizational frame works differently than the traditional environmental frame in that it demands what Karl Weick and Donald Schon term "reflective practice" and "critical inquiry" for organizational understanding (Weick, 2011; Schon, 1987; Gondo & Amis, 2013). This organizational frame for SOF design

should encompass appreciation of all subsequent frames, in that the solutions to complex problems on which special operations as an organization decide are deeply tied to the organization itself. All SOF design approaches require a far greater emphasis on tacit knowledge construction and highly skilled performers, which reduces reliance on existing doctrinal design considerations. Ideally, the optimal special operations design approach does not yet exist and likely challenges standing positions and organizational barriers. Designers are charged with creatively developing these solutions to complex problems and then critically reflecting n SOF institutionalisms to determine the best manner to articulate and implement the design deliverable. Once again, designing with rules of thumb will trump standardized design practices.

Finally, special operations needs to experiment with design in ways that will defy conventional thinking. Again, general purpose organizational structure is explicit based; the problems confronting special operations and the organization itself are decidedly tacit in nature. War is wickedly complex, with tacit and explicit combinations occurring at all scales, yet organizationally general purpose forces and special operations forces organize towards different problem-solving applications. Both have tacit performers, both face explicit tasks, yet the overarching organizations of both aim for different goals in war.

No innovation occurs in standardization, and no transformation comes without risk. Design failure is always inherent when confronting complex, adaptive problems where adversaries continue to improvise and seek new vulnerabilities. The cookie-cutter design approach, whether in execution using misapplied conventional practices or through limited and short-term design education, will provide an incompatible and inadequate match for the demands of special operation missions. Instituting a long-term design model for the entire force requires lengthy investments in education, individual-tailored selection and management, diverse and novel approaches to design solutions, and avoidance of overreliance on emerging technologies. Tools are still tools, regardless of their unique and improved capabilities. If GRIN tools receive significant organizational attention, the same should be given to the cognitive tools under the designer's skullcap (or green beret). Some of those research and developmental periods may take just as long, but they may offer profoundly different and unexpected benefits to the force.

## CONCLUSION: "SOF CAN'T GO BACK TO YESTERDAY BECAUSE IT WAS DIFFERENT THEN"

Military organizations tend to favor the yesteryear self-identifications that historian Carl Builder (1989) termed "the Golden Age for military forces in warfare." We prefer to imagine the past, and remember the future, as Karl Weick offered (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001, p. 975; Weick, 2006, p. 448). In other words, our military tends to predict future events based on flawed reasoning where we misunderstand past events. This is not unusual, and special operations as well can be susceptible to the history, rituals, institutionalisms, and desire to repeat previously (seemingly) successful models against emergent problems. However, complexity routinely rejects existent solutions, and emergent problems cannot be explained using previous language and knowledge without creating new understandings (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011, p. 46; Lewis, 2010, p. 210).

Special operations as an organization relies on, and is largely defined by, highly skilled performers who deal with tacit knowledge construction. Despite the underlining existence of

special operations' explicit knowledge and many standardized practices, the overarching roles, requirements, and missions for special operations is tacit, emergent, and dynamic. Military design continues to orbit along a decidedly explicit path where standardization is sought to reduce tacit knowledge requirements. Special operations should avoid simply adapting existing design methodologies, practices, and education models without first critically reflecting on whether or not SOF needs designers that work with tacit knowledge in highly tailored, unique, and organizationally transforming ways; one is not the other. The costs for developing special operations' unique designers are higher overall, yet the long-term deliverables will undoubtedly return on the investment in ways unrecognizable from this perspective.

## NOTES

1. Both documents implicitly make major ontological choices on the nature of complexity and the promise of increased technological and institutional overmatch against all potential adversaries.
2. This author was a primary design consultant for the formation of these advanced design programs at JSOU. USSOCOM also invited this author to be the primary instructor on the design theory class for the advanced program in 2015. This author is now the course director for design programs at USSOCOM Joint Special Operations University as of 2016.
3. This position deviates from U.S. Army current design doctrine where design is a subcomponent of planning. However, USSOCOM decided in February 2015 to focus the JSOU design programs on joint doctrine (operational design) that does not explicitly define design as a subcomponent and methodology within overarching planning. Joint doctrine somewhat confusingly distinguishes between "operational design" and "Army design" concepts.
4. For three subsequent School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) directors and faculty, a vast difference of opinion is expressed in three distinct design articles in *Military Review* issues from 2009 to 2013. The significant variation and paradox among the article content provides insight into the institutional well as political disagreement within the U.S. Army on design.
5. PMESII is understood in joint and U.S. Army doctrine as "the state of the situation," whereas DIME represents the various reductionist elements of national power that a nation can apply to a conflict.
6. This citation provides an example of the small footprint, length of commitment, and dissimilar strategies for special operations warfare.
7. Tip of the hat to Dr. Christopher Paparone. Upon reading an early draft of this article, he noted that the *Alice in Wonderland* raven metaphor had yet another connection: John Rambo, perhaps the most famous Hollywood special forces character in cinema, used the call sign "Raven" during his exploits.

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# SOF, Airpower, and Special Operations Airmen: Limited by Our Own Imaginations

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Special operations forces and airpower are the two most flexible, but least understood, elements of Western military power. Misunderstanding has led to missed opportunities which we can no longer afford as we face an expanding array of complex, dynamic threats with shrinking military resources. Integrating airpower and special operations has enormous untapped potential across the spectrum of conflict, and particularly in preventative situations, but only if airmen and special operators work together.

Through the use of case studies the authors present examples of successful SOF-airpower integration, but remind the readers that these instances were ad hoc, not addressed in pre-war training and doctrine, and at times resisted by senior leadership from both camps. The article concludes with the suggestion that special operations airmen ought to be the "bridge" between the airpower and special operations communities while seeking opportunities to exploit the advantage airpower offers during peacetime engagement scenarios.

Keywords: special operations, SOF, airpower, integration, Afghanistan, Iraq, Colombia, military assistance, foreign internal defense, aviation FID

Special operations forces (SOF) and airpower are probably the two most flexible elements of military power. Working together, they have achieved amazing results across the entire spectrum of military operations. Unfortunately, SOF and airpower are also among the least understood elements of military power, which has led to misunderstandings and missed opportunities. And the potential for misunderstanding and missed opportunities increases exponentially in large multinational organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treat Organization (NATO). In an era when Western military resources are shrinking, and threats are expanding and diversifying, we cannot afford to continue missing opportunities.

It is our contention that when airpower and SOF, in all their forms, are fully integrated, it is possible to generate influencing effects across the entire spectrum of conflict far beyond what we have already achieved. And we cannot rely on conventional air forces to make this leap into creative and critical thinking for us. SOF, and particularly SOF airmen, need to lead the effort to fully exploit the untapped potential in the integration of SOF and airpower.[1] To date, special operators, whether air, land, or maritime oriented, have not always shown the imagination necessary to achieve the full potential of SOF–airpower integration and the gaps have been particularly visible in our training and

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doctrine. The picture tends to look even worse when we consider NATO's multinational perspective, as our imaginations have not expanded to match the size of the 28-nation alliance. Instead, we have retreated into consensus at the "lowest common denominator," which is a nice way of saying that our collective imagination is stuck at the level of the least imaginative person in the room. Our adversaries, on the other hand, continue to evolve, and new adversaries emerge in new locations, presenting us with an enormously adaptive and dynamic environment that demands more imagination than we sometimes show. Airmen and SOF who cling to the belief (hope?) that what we have done in Afghanistan and Iraq for the past 15 years is all that SOF and airpower need to be doing for the next 15 are setting us up for failure.

It is worthwhile to briefly describe some popular misconceptions concerning SOF and airpower, as well as point out their counterproductive consequences. Airpower, for example, is too often seen as merely kinetic strikes, or "putting warheads on foreheads" (Mulrine, 2008); and SOF is too often thought of only in terms of direct action (DA) raids against high-value targets, in other words, "doing bad things to bad people" (Gray, 2009).[2] These twin misconceptions generate fun movies, memorable bumper stickers, and, to be honest, more than a few airmen and special operators joined their services hoping to participate in exactly these sorts of activities. At the policy level, however, these misconceptions combine to give the impression that SOF and airpower are alternative ways of striking the same targets, which in turn leads to the counterproductive idea that SOF and airpower are in competition with each other and that one may be used to substitute for the other. The popular movie *Zero Dark Thirty* neatly captured this idea in the scene when the hero of the story, the intelligence analyst who figured out where Osama bin Laden was hiding, tells the SOF assault team leader that she did not want him to conduct the raid and would have preferred to use bombs from an aircraft—in other words, airpower—to kill bin Laden.

The truth is that kinetic effects are only one of the many things airpower can accomplish, and direct action is merely one of the many core activities of special operations. Far from being in competition with each other, SOF and airpower are complementary elements of military power that can achieve vastly more by working together than either could possibly achieve alone.

This article examines the strategic effects that SOF and airpower can achieve by working together, across the spectrum of military operations, and some of the changes we recommend to achieve even more in the future than we have in the past. The topic is so vast and bursting with possibilities that this article merely scratches the surface, but we hope it will inspire others to continue thinking about SOF and airpower and finding new ways for these elements to work together, particularly in a multinational and NATO context.

## SOME DEFINITIONS AND DOCTRINE

Having complained about other people not understanding special operations and airpower, we should note what we think these terms mean. And because this article hopes to inspire greater integration of SOF and airpower in the United States and across NATO, it would be nice if the official U.S. and NATO definitions of these terms were reasonably congruent with each other. First we take a look at the official definitions.

In NATO doctrine, we find a vague definition of airpower. According to the *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations* (AJP-3): "Once sufficient control of the air has been

achieved, air power provides the possibilities to project military power where and when needed, unlimited by natural barriers" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization Standardization Agency [NSA], 2011). Beyond this vague statement about possibilities, which is really more of a description than a definition, there is nothing explicit in NATO doctrine—including in the *Allied Joint Doctrine for Air and Space Operations* (AJP 3.3)—that states exactly what airpower is.

U.K. doctrine takes a very different approach and defines "air power" right up front, on page 1-1 of the *UK Air and Space Doctrine* (JDP 0-30). In fact, the Brits step back to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of "power" before advancing to define air power as "using air capabilities to influence the behavior of actors and the course of events" (Ministry of Defence, 2013). This definition includes the purpose of air power (influencing actors and events) and leads into what U.K. doctrine considers the four fundamental roles of air power: control of the air; intelligence and situational awareness; attack; and air mobility. U.K. doctrine writers are quite proud that these four roles have been central to British air doctrine since 1928 (Ministry of Defence, 2013). U.K. doctrine treats each of the various capabilities possible through airpower, including space and cyber, as falling under one or more of these four fundamental roles.

Our own nation, the United States, says essentially the same thing; we just do not say it as well. It is interesting that the U.S. authors felt the need to define airpower and its core functions in a way that recognizes each of the "tribes" that makes up the U.S. Air Force. Thus, the U.S. defines airpower as "the ability to project military power or influence through the control and exploitation of air, space, and cyberspace to achieve strategic, operational, or tactical objectives" (U.S. Air Force, 2011). The needless obfuscation of "air, space, and cyberspace" seems intended to placate various tribes within the U.S. Air Force and the specification of "strategic, operational, and tactical objectives" seems redundant, because all military power should address the effects desired at the different levels of war. But the important point to take from comparing the different definitions is that airpower offers a means of influencing adversaries and partners. It is the *influencing* aspect—in both the negative, lethal, or kinetic effects and the positive, nonlethal, or nonkinetic applications—of airpower that needs to be emphasized as we seek strategic effects in an uncertain, complex, and uncomfortable future.

As for special operations, NATO defines them as "military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces using operational tactics, techniques, and modes of employment not standard to conventional forces" (NSA, 2011). The U.S. definition is similar. According to U.S. JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, "Special operations require unique modes of employment, tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment. They are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014). What we like about these two definitions is that they emphasize unconventional modes of employment regardless of the physical environment—land, maritime, or air—thus leaving it to the nations and to the special operators themselves to determine how and whether to designate a unit, an organization, a capability, or a person as SOF. More important, the definitions focus on the unconventional modes of employment, rather than on the equipment used, since equipment tested and proven by SOF is often adapted and adopted by conventional forces. The definitions of special operations also look beyond a specific physical environment to the policy context of "hostile, denied, or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments." (Because the United Kingdom is a little bit shy about publishing unclassified SOF doctrine, we do not include a U.K. definition of "special operations.")

As demonstrated here, the doctrine and definitions of special operations and airpower are generally satisfactory and reasonably congruent between the United States and NATO. Unfortunately, when it comes to integrating special operations and airpower doctrine, the landscape is barren. Lacking satisfactory official doctrine, let's look at how SOF and airpower have successfully worked together in the recent past to see how SOF and airpower might combine to achieve strategic effects in the future to identify the direction future doctrine should take.

## THREE MODELS FOR SOF–AIRPOWER SYNERGY ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Let's start by considering three very different models of SOF–airpower integration from the early stages of Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (late 2001 to mid-2003). The first is the so-called Afghan model from late 2001, when SOF linked up with anti-Taliban Afghan forces and, with the help of U.S. airpower, drove the Taliban from power and installed a new government in about two months. What SOF and airpower accomplished in Afghanistan during the opening months of OEF is probably the greatest strategic success ever achieved by U.S. SOF. Success on the ground was made possible by the totality of airpower, not just strike operations. Special operations air assets inserted the ground SOF teams and extracted downed aircrews and friendly casualties. Air transport sorties resupplied U.S. SOF and fed, clothed, and armed anti-Taliban Afghan forces (Briscoe, Kiper, Shroder, & Sepp, 2003). Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) tracks provided vital intelligence to all levels of command. Virtually every type of land- and carrier-based U.S. strike aircraft was used against the Taliban; and aerial refueling missions made it all possible (Lambeth, 2005). SOF proudly and quite justifiably claims to be the "tip of the spear." But in Afghanistan, in 2001, it was airpower in all its forms—special operations and conventional, manned and unmanned, rotary wing and fixed wing, and so on—that served as the "shaft" and gave the "tip of the spear" much of its weight and power.

The Afghan campaign in the fall of 2001 was merely the beginning. During the invasion of Iraq in 2003, SOF and airpower again combined to achieve unprecedented levels of integration and success. In the north, a special operations task force linked up with indigenous Kurdish forces and, with the help of coalition airpower, pinned down large numbers of Iraqi conventional forces. As in Afghanistan, it was the totality of airpower, and not just strike missions, that led to success. While 2003 in Iraq may seem like a repeat of the Afghan model, it was actually quite different. SOF in Afghanistan in 2001 were the main effort supported by all U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and coalition assets, whereas SOF in Iraq in 2003 were not the main effort, and the special operations task force in northern Iraq was not even the main SOF effort. Furthermore, even with support from SOF and airpower, the indigenous Kurdish forces in northern Iraq had no chance of conquering Baghdad and Basra the way the anti-Taliban Afghan forces had taken Kabul and Kandahar. Instead, SOF, indigenous forces, and airpower in northern Iraq were an economy-of-force effort designed to employ the fewest coalition assets possible to protect areas under Kurdish control (and thus cement strong postwar relations with the Kurds), destroy terrorist sanctuaries in northern Iraq (mainly around Halabja), and tie down as many Iraqi forces as possible to keep them from interfering with the main effort: the march on Baghdad by conventional ground forces coming up from Kuwait (Briscoe & U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2006). Some special operators had great difficulty shaking the "close with and destroy the enemy" mind-set that

had worked against the Taliban and struggled to embrace the less-familiar missions of economy of force and preservation of the force (Grdovic, 2015).

An even more unusual case was the combined special operations task force operating in western Iraq during the opening stages of OIF. In the west the mission was to prevent the Iraqis from using ballistic missiles against friendly countries in the region. Twelve years earlier, the greatest threat to the strategic success of Operation Desert Storm had been Saddam Hussein's effort to expand the war by attacking Israel with Scud missiles. Back then, the coalition response was sluggish, ad hoc, and barely successful. This time the coalition had a much more deliberate and imaginative plan.

USCENTCOM gave the mission of offensive ballistic missile defense ("Scud hunting") to the air component commander (the designated "Scud czar"), who was also responsible for a large ground area of operations in western Iraq. The combined special operations task force in western Iraq became one of the SOF ground components working in battlespace owned by a conventional Air Force general and supporting his Scud-hunting mission. The SOF task forces moved into Iraq from Jordan and Saudi Arabia and were reinforced with conventional ground assets such as tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, and High-Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS). SOF traditionalists sometimes act as if conventional assets, such as tanks and artillery, will hold them back, but experience has demonstrated that HIMARS represented a significant firepower improvement over the 40 mm grenade launcher that special forces teams possess, and that tanks and Bradleys in reserve significantly decreased the risks of aggressive SOF ground operations going wrong.

The ground and rotary wing SOF elements conducting the western Iraq campaign relied on air-delivered resupply rather than overland supply routes. SOF traditionalists might like to imagine that conventional airpower must support ground SOF, but the success of the 2003 Scud hunt demonstrated the effectiveness of ground SOF in support of conventional air operations, *under the command of a conventional Air Force general* (Briscoe & U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2006).

Thus the early stages of OEF and OIF provide three very different models of SOF–airpower interaction in high-intensity combat situations. The Afghan model had airpower in support of SOF as the main effort achieving regime change through unconventional warfare (UW). The Northern Iraq model had airpower in support of SOF using UW in an economy-of-force mission with no intention that the UW force would take over the government. The Western Iraq model had ground SOF in support of airpower in a counter–ballistic missile mission. All three models were remarkably successful, and yet all three were beyond the imagination of prewar doctrine writers and exercise planners. And all three had their detractors.

The Afghan model caused the most debate because its success was so spectacular and unexpected but also because there was so little else competing for attention immediately after the collapse of the Taliban. Some airpower zealots, such as Benjamin Lambeth at RAND, claimed that the model signaled a "new way of war" which offered a relatively inexpensive means of using military force to achieve national policy objectives in future conflicts (Lambeth, 2005; Andres, Wills, & Griffith, 2005–2006). Stephen Biddle, then at the U.S. Army War College, coined the term *Afghan model* but noted there were important preconditions necessary for the model to succeed—the most important being that the indigenous allies had to possess military skills and motivation comparable to the adversary they were facing. No amount of

airpower, said Biddle, could overcome the local forces' lack of basic infantry skills in the face of a capable and determined opponent (Biddle, 2002, 2005–2006).

The two Iraq models received considerably less attention because they seemed less spectacular than the conquest of Baghdad by conventional forces and because continuing challenges in Iraq (first the frustrating months searching for Saddam Hussein and later the insurgency) made everything associated with early stages of OIF seem less important. There were also specific problems with each mission that may have made them less popular with both SOF and conventional air forces. Northern Iraq was an economy-of-force mission that almost by definition is a high-risk, high-reward operation in which the economy-of-force element takes all the risk and the main effort receives all the rewards. Historically, SOF have often performed in a diversionary or economy-of-force role, but modern SOF leaders who have grown more accustomed to their role as the "decisive" element might reasonably lack enthusiasm for a model where SOF take great risks to enable someone else to achieve decisive results somewhere else. By the same token, SOF leaders in western Iraq were not entirely thrilled to be working for the air component commander (rather than the special operations component commander), and U.S. Air Force leaders were slow to embrace a ground component as a routine part of air operations.

What was missing from the postconflict discussions about all three models was how different they were from preconflict doctrine and how mutual ignorance between SOF and conventional airpower had added to the challenges in all three cases. In the Afghan model, the U.S. Air Force did not even have a term to describe what they were doing to support SOF because their doctrine acknowledged only three types of strike missions: strategic attack, interdiction, and close air support; the decisive strike missions in Afghanistan often fit none of these categories. For their part, the SOF teams on the ground described all airstrikes they directed as close air support (CAS), regardless of whether the strikes were actually "close" or in "support" of anything other than general attrition of enemy forces. They did so because CAS was the only term they had for describing airstrikes. If airpower doctrine was unhelpful at the beginning of OEF, SOF doctrine was not much better. UW doctrine at the time envisioned a long period of organizing and training indigenous forces before employing them, but Northern Alliance commanders were impatient and had little interest in housing, feeding, and paying a large force during a long training period. They claimed that once they had weapons and ammunition, and airstrikes had weakened the Taliban, they would call in fighters and launch their attack, and they kept that promise.

Unsurprisingly, the weaknesses in pre-9/11 air and SOF doctrine were nothing compared to the inadequacy of the systems to integrate the two in Afghanistan in 2001. The joint SOF task force's ignorance of the air tasking order (ATO) cycle was nicely matched by the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC)'s ignorance of UW planning. And the two communities did not even know enough to judge the contours of their mutual ignorance. Unfortunately, the special operations airmen within the SOF task force did not have the knowledge or the experience with airpower to help bridge the gap between the two communities. A conventional airman finally arrived to serve as air liaison officer (ALO) to the joint SOF task force, and the task force commander immediately shook his hand and said, "Am I glad to see you!" But even the conventional ALO had to learn about SOF to be effective.

Time and energy were also wasted arguing over who was supporting whom. The fact was that airpower and SOF were in mutual support, in other words, the ground teams were supporting airpower by identifying targets (serving from an air perspective, as ground-based ISR) and airpower was eliminating enemy forces to allow the ground elements to conduct their

missions (serving, from the ground perspective, as fire support). And even though "mutual support" is a doctrinal term, and was appropriate in this case, far too few of the airmen or special operators involved had the imagination to recognize and capitalize on the situation. Thanks to a lot of hard work by a lot of dedicated people, the opening months of OEF succeeded, but the prewar lack of imagination and lack of mutual understanding made everything much more difficult than it needed to be. And as we saw later, once operations in Afghanistan took on a coalition perspective the obstacles to successful integration and interoperability became even greater.

Longer planning times helped things run a bit more smoothly in western Iraq, but that does not mean it was easy or natural for the air planners to take full advantage of the real-time human intelligence and other unfamiliar assets they had available from the SOF teams dashing around western Iraq. Nor did it come naturally to the special operations task force to support an air campaign. SOF teams swarming over potential launch cites was not a cornerstone of U.S. ballistic missile defense doctrine before OIF, and the success of the 2003 Scud hunt came more in spite of pre-9/11 training and doctrine than because of it.

We wish we could say that things have improved enormously since 2003, but that would be too generous. True, U.S. air doctrine now includes the term *counterland* to cover attacks on ground targets that are not necessarily strategic attack, interdiction, or close air support, and U.S. UW doctrine now acknowledges that a UW campaign might not require a long period of organizing and training forces, but these moves just paper over the obvious cracks in previous doctrine. There has been no coherent reframing of the entire problem of achieving mutual support and synergy between SOF and airpower as a normal and routine activity. The fact is that training and doctrine are still run separately for special operations forces and conventional air forces, which limits the mutual understanding between them and, in turn, limits the imagination and creativity each side might bring to integrating their capabilities and potentialities. They occasionally address each other during exercises, but usually only as bit players in a SOF- or air-dominated show, not as full partners in mutual support of each other. And this is happening among Americans, in the combat-oriented scenarios we think we are good at. The situation is even more difficult in multinational and less kinetic situations.

## THE RANGE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

NATO doctrine does not follow the Phase 0 through 5 construct that has become popular in recent U.S. military thought. Instead, NATO doctrine contains a range of military operations from major combat operations through peacetime military engagement. For NATO, "combat" refers to defense of NATO territory from a major aggressor or a large-scale military intervention outside of NATO territory. "Security" operations are those that enable the transition from combat to a stable, functioning, local government. They may be characterized by lawlessness, insurgency, chaos, and instability. The third area is "peace support" operations. These include peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peace building, conflict prevention, and humanitarian operations, all of which may occur simultaneously in an area of operations and are usually predicated upon a truce or ceasefire being in place. Finally, "peacetime military engagement" signifies those normal military activities intended to shape the peacetime environment. This includes multinational training and exercises but also training teams and advisors to build partner capacity, foster interoperability, and develop

positive relationships. Peacetime military engagement may also include humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, as well as noncombatant evacuations (NSA, 2013).

While we hope to avoid war, the NATO alliance must be prepared for the possibility of the "most dangerous" threats to our nations and our alliance. Article 5, the fundamental principle of the Washington Treaty, was originally written to address this most dangerous threat to the survival of Western Europe. If nothing else, what the past 25 years have taught us is that Article 5 events are relatively unlikely (Article 5 has been implemented only once in the history of the alliance, as a result of the September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States), while hybrid threats that fall short of that threshold—in other words, security, peace support, and peacetime engagement—are the more likely scenarios facing NATO as an alliance and NATO nations individually or in ad hoc coalitions.[3] Even the Russians, in their current threatening stance toward several NATO states, are keeping their actions below a level that would invoke Article 5.

Some have claimed that the less kinetic part of the conflict spectrum is the best place for SOF to operate. We think the three models mentioned previously demonstrate that SOF can do more during major combat operations than conduct a few direct action and special reconnaissance missions. However, there is no denying the long and impressive record of SOF in peacetime engagement and small wars. Pre-9/11 and throughout the Cold War, small or brushfire wars were routinely assigned to light, airborne, and special operations forces. Counterinsurgency, irregular warfare, asymmetric warfare, and the like were usually given to these same forces, partly because no one else wanted those tasks but also because SOF had the imagination to cope simultaneously with multiple, adaptive enemies in politically sensitive environments. As we look to the future, we should consider how SOF and airpower might offer synergies in situations that do not qualify as major combat operations.

## TWO MODELS OF SOF–AIRPOWER SYNERGY AT THE LOW END OF THE CONFLICT SPECTRUM

Between world wars, imperial Britain maintained a cadre of airmen who employed unique, innovative, and unconventional skills to integrate airpower into the institutions of civilian government. Today we would call them special operators; in fact, a few of them went on to become part of Britain's Special Operations Executive or the famed Long Range Desert Group during World War II. The Royal Air Force (RAF) Special Service Officers (SSOs), as they were known at the time, were trained and equipped to maintain situational awareness for colonial and local civil authorities in the regions that were too dangerous for civilian administrators and, when needed, to bring the appropriate elements of airpower to bear. Theirs was an isolated and harsh life that required an adventurous spirit and the ability to succeed in severe conditions. They normally lived by themselves among the local populations, developing relationships and serving as conduits for information between the local populace and the government, providing access to government services, and when necessary dispensing punishment for transgressions (such as raiding, stealing, and conflicts with neighboring tribes). Over time, many of these SSOs established a relationship of trust with their hosts, to the point that they were sometimes asked to mediate disputes between different tribes or represent local grievances to colonial administrators at the district and regional levels. By 1930, the RAF had concluded that airpower could also improve health conditions, provide education, enhance communications with civil authorities,

and relieve distress where civilian services were inadequate—roles that went well beyond the traditional, kinetic applications of airpower.

Based upon his experiences in Yemen, Air Commodore Portal's (1937) goal for the air control method of maintaining peace and stability was that the locals should think of "landing grounds as the point of contact with civilization and [the place] from which the benefits of civilization could be obtained" – an interesting perspective for an officer who led Bomber Command in 1940 and was chief of the British Air Staff for most of World War II.

Studies of the RAF's air control scheme too often take a kinetic perspective and claim that what the RAF accomplished between the wars was equivalent to the no-fly zones of post–Cold War era Kosovo, Bosnia, Northern Watch, Southern Watch, and so on. They claim that the RAF simply bombed defenseless nomadic tribes and villages to extract taxes and impose a brutal colonial peace. This misrepresents both airpower and the role of airmen on the ground integrating airpower into the political administration. Particularly in the latter half of the interwar years, the SSOs on the ground took an imaginative and pragmatic approach to maintaining order, combining manned ISR, air mobility, and information operations, while maintaining the option to administer strike operations when approved by civil authorities. As a side note, the rules of engagement and targeting restrictions the RAF operated under during the latter half of the interwar period look quite similar to those governing modern air operations.

A second and more recent example of SOF–airpower synergy short of a major theater war can be found in Colombia during its decades-long battle with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC). The Colombian government enjoyed near-total air supremacy over FARC, just as the British did over colonies in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. However, through the 1990s, the Colombians often failed to make their air supremacy decisive against FARC. To make matters worse, Colombian conventional ground forces made little headway against FARC, and Colombia had inadequate SOF. Starting in the late 1990s with Plan Colombia, U.S. military assistance helped change this situation. With U.S. advice and assistance, the Colombians built an impressive SOF capability and also developed effective airpower, particularly assault helicopters. U.S. assistance helped the Colombians use their improved airpower and SOF in a synergistic way to hunt down and defeat FARC in the vast jungles of eastern Colombia. Strong national leadership was vital to Colombian success, as were reforms to the Colombian police and conventional military forces, but U.S. assistance and training, particularly by U.S. SOF, were vital to creating a SOF–airpower synergy that overwhelmed FARC (Moyar, Pagan, & Griego, 2014).

The British colonial example may seem a bit out of date, but keep in mind how primitive air capabilities were at the time (for example, helicopters had not been invented) and the fact that British SSOs were essentially trying to retain control of foreign countries whose independence was inevitable. One might argue that what the SSOs could do in the interwar period we should be better able to do today because (a) modern airpower is vastly more capable and (b) our SOF will be advising indigenous administrators rather than trying to buttress a doomed colonial administration. The key takeaway from the Colombian example is that training indigenous air forces—aviation foreign internal defense (FID)—is what gives the host nation the ability to exploit its asymmetric advantage in the air. Eventually the Colombians' own imagination took the synergy between airpower and SOF in directions the United States had not led them, as demonstrated in the Colombians' famous hostage rescue mission, Operation Jaque.

Let's compare the Colombia model—intervening before the state collapses to give the indigenous forces the ability to solve their own problems—with the Afghan model of using indigenous forces to overthrow a disastrous local government. The Afghan model produced rapid and dramatic results, but at its moment of triumph the Afghan model got Afghanistan up to only the lowest point Colombia sank to. Thus in strategic terms, even a successful implementation of the Afghan model merely gives us a second chance to attempt the Colombia model. This makes the Afghan model a precursor to the Colombia model rather than an alternative to the Colombia model.

In fact, the transition from us doing combat operations to helping the indigenous forces conduct their own combat operations is the natural progression of military missions. For example, NATO in Afghanistan went through exactly this transition from direct action to military assistance. A decade ago, before there was a NATO SOF Headquarters (NSHQ), the NATO staff considered how NATO might create a SOF air capability. At the time, the focus was purely on direct action, the most pressing need for NATO SOF as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) expanded its mandate to cover the whole of Afghanistan. By 2011, however, ISAF's focus was shifting away from DA and toward building the capacity of the Afghan security forces. As a result, military assistance took on a primary role and the commander of NSHQ at the time told his staff that military assistance was the number-one mission of NATO SOF, which is why military assistance (MA) was listed first in documents such as the *NSHQ Special Air Warfare Manual*.

Because high-end combat missions are almost always followed by FID/MA/security assistance missions, it follows that, whenever possible, we would be better to get the FID/MA/security assistance missions right before we have to do major combat operations so we can skip that costly activity. To put it another way, we should use the Colombia model early rather than letting things deteriorate and forcing us to use the Afghan model to regain control, followed by the Colombia model to "win the peace."

And we can improve upon the Colombia model by intervening even earlier with even smaller forces than we used in Colombia. Plan Colombia was too expensive to implement in every threatened country and the aviation piece is what drove up the cost. One of the things that made the air piece so expensive was that too much of our assistance to air forces in the developing world is run by conventional airmen trying to increase foreign military sales (FMS). From their perspective, Colombia became interesting only when the situation became so bad that they needed to buy and operate hundreds of the same aircraft that the United States used (in this case, modernized H-1s and UH-60 helicopters). Things would go differently if aviation FID was run by SOF operators.

Special operators who happen to be airmen remember that, during every humanitarian crisis since the Berlin Airlift, nonlethal airpower provided an immediate and overwhelming advantage, in the forms of air transport, reconnaissance, and situational awareness, medical evacuation, and restoring services in isolated regions. Special operators who understand airpower recognize there is no reason to wait for a disaster because SOF plus airpower could and should be doing the same sorts of operations every day, on a smaller scale, and with their host nation counterparts. They know that advising and assisting host nations to better use the equipment they already possess would help prevent conflicts and crises by strengthening national institutions, providing vital services beyond the major population centers, and enhancing national legitimacy among the least served of populations—all at a cost, in both financial and human terms, that is orders of magnitude lower than the costs of conflict and crisis. In short, SOF and airpower—ideally indigenous SOF and

airpower assisted and advised by U.S. or other NATO SOF—can bring development and governance to the most distant and unstable regions of developing countries, the same way the SSOs once brought the same benefits to the remote corners of the British Empire.

To use a medical analogy, peacetime engagement is sort of a "healthy lifestyle choice" that can help avoid future problems. Just as the doctor may recommend exercise, losing weight, or stopping smoking to improve the chance of a longer and more productive life, peacetime military assistance is a small change we can make now—in other words, a "healthy alternative" to avoid more drastic intervention later. And over the course of a long-term peacetime security assistance and cooperation program, we can expect to create relationships that yield unexpected, positive results in some future situation in yet another unknown locale.[4]

Unfortunately, we are not handling the aviation piece of this problem as well as we ought to. General Joseph Votel, the USSOCOM commander, in his March 2015 testimony before U.S. Congress, stated that U.S. SOF were "deployed to more than 80 countries" (Votel, 2015); and, at an unclassified level, it is fair to assume that most of these deployments involved elements of special operations aviation and aviators and involved some sort of FID/MA/security assistance. But how many of them involved aviation FID conducted by SOF aviators? Few, if any, and in our opinion, and this is an inexcusable missed opportunity to make a decisive difference "left of bang."

SOF airmen can make their greatest contribution to national security by advising, assisting, and training with their counterparts in order to enhance their partners' capabilities and capacities. In nearly every case, it begins with understanding the partner's aspirations and the reality of the partner's situation—internal, external, and environmental threats, domestic and regional politics, fiscal health, and the government's role in society. Then, in partnership with the host, the question becomes this: "How might that government use what it already has or might procure at minimal cost, in a way that will improve their situation in the near term?" Army Special Forces teams do this every day with their security forces counterparts in the nations they are working in. Why should SOF airmen not do the same? They could, but it is rare when they do. This may be because too many SOF airmen are of the opinion that they do not *do* special operations, but rather they only *support* special operations. Or worse, that the only role for SOF air is precision air mobility in a direct action context. Clinging to this view cheats our nation and our allies out of the full benefits of airpower and could doom SOF aviators to irrelevance in the future.

If airmen are to be special operators, then they must get beyond the idea that landing a C-130 on a beach to set up a forward air refueling point makes them SOF. In NATO, there are already air forces whose conventional C-130s do this. Not too long ago, only SOF aircrews flew with night vision devices (NVDs); now, nearly every Western aviator learns to fly with some sort of NVD. The same may be said about fast-roping and rappelling from helicopters. Both used to be the province of SOF, but now conventional and police forces routinely fast-rope and rappel. In short, what was "special" yesterday is conventional today, and as conventional forces evolve to become more "SOF-like" they will close the capabilities gap unless SOF aviation also evolves. What conventional air forces are not going to get good at in the near future is the military assistance role (advice, assist, and train) as SOF does it, in the host's setting, usually in their language, and using their equipment, to address the host's challenges.

These preventive types of air operations will not look like the precision DA and counter-terrorism (CT) operations in hostile and denied areas that have captured our imaginations since before 9/11. But if FID/MA/security assistance is a mission for the land and maritime SOF, it is

equally a mission for the air elements. Fragile governments that need extensive FID/MA/security assistance by SOF almost always enjoy air supremacy over their own territories and their inability to exploit this advantage is a critical weakness that aviation FID by SOF airmen can solve. Small, specially organized and trained air teams advising and assisting partner nations in sensitive regions, adapting their skills to the reality of their partners' conditions, and with small, politically acceptable footprints, is what SOF airmen should strive for. Using unique, innovative, and unconventional means to avoid future conflicts will continue to be what makes SOF "special"—a reality that airmen need to embrace if they are to *be* SOF and to *do* special operations, rather than merely support land and maritime SOF.

## CONCLUSION

How, then, ought we go forward? In a word, rebalance. Terrorists and insurgents know we can find them, track them, and, when we are ready, pick them up or pick them off. If you need proof of how effective the combination of SOF and airpower is, we would ask you to read the al Qaeda memorandum found in Mali outlining countermeasures to avoid detection and targeting by coalition air forces or to look at what SOF and airpower have done in central Africa to neutralize the Lord's Resistance Army (Forest, 2014).[5] The United States and our NATO allies have shown that, together, our SOF and airpower are good at DA and CT.

We have also done reasonably well integrating SOF and airpower in shooting wars, as noted earlier in discussing the Afghan model and the two Iraq models. This integration, however, has tended to be ad hoc and outside our routine doctrine and training, even though shooting wars dominate our training and doctrine. We clearly have room to improve in this area and we believe that the key to improvement is for SOF and conventional airpower communities to gain a better understanding of each other. With improved mutual understanding, opportunities for synergy and mutual support will become obvious. We believe that the members of the SOF aviation community must embrace their role as the natural linkage between the two communities. SOF airmen must know all aspects of SOF and conventional airpower so that they can be the glue holding the two communities together, as well as the grease that mitigates the friction between them.

Finally, and most importantly, SOF airmen need to recognize that their most important role is "left of bang" in the area of FID/MA/security assistance. We have the opportunity to use the West's asymmetric advantage—airpower—to bring services and influence to isolated regions, often providing air-oriented services at first (assistance) but simultaneously developing the host nation's capacity to provide safe and reliable airpower (advice and training) appropriate to the partner nation's capabilities so that they can exploit their asymmetric advantage of air supremacy over their own territory. And we should do so as SOF airmen—in their language, using equipment appropriate to their means, and within the context of their situations. Often, we may not be flying. Our experiences have been that teaching people to fly is fun and necessary, but building the partner's ability and willingness to consider noncombat roles for air resources they already own, and then facilitating military planning with civilian counterparts, can do the most to build strong institutions able to resist the effects of subversion, disinformation, propaganda, and lawlessness.

When land and maritime teams deploy to build the capacity of partners, SOF airmen need to be embedded with those teams to advise, assist, or train with the partner nation's airmen. If

NATO or the European Union (EU) deploys a military-assistance mission to a struggling region, there ought to be SOF airmen integrating airpower assistance and developing advisory and training programs that will leave an appropriate capability in place once the assistance mission ends. The possibilities are endless, but they can occur only if SOF airmen overcome their singular focus on DA/CT *support* to other SOF and seek imaginative ways to *be* SOF.

## NOTES

1. The term *airman* refers to any individual, regardless of service affiliation, gender, or rank, who understands and practices the application of airpower principles and doctrine (*Special Air Warfare Manual*, NATO Special Operations Headquarters, March 2012, p. 2.
2. "We do bad things to bad people" is the motto of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (A).
3. For example, NATO has long been involved in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia without invoking Article 5; and for several years NATO countries, but not the NATO alliance, have been involved in improving security in Mali.
4. For example, after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Jordan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) all sent military personnel to assist the post-Taliban government of Afghanistan. The long pre-9/11 security assistance relationships between the United States and all three of these countries was one of the reasons they assisted the United States in Afghanistan post-9/11.
5. For the memo in Arabic and English, see http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-papers-drones.pdf. For an article about the memo, see http://news.yahoo.com/al-qaida-tipsheet-avoiding-drones-found-mali-173015912.html.

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# Countering ISIS's Social Media Influence

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The success of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in recruiting and sustaining foreign fighter flow (Baron, 2016) is seen by many as a product of the organization's potent social media efforts (Al-Tamimi, 2014; Brooking & Singer, 2016). This research argues, however, that a different approach to both problem analysis (Metz, 2015) and measures of effectiveness can potentially counter ISIS's influence efforts. This includes adopting a whole-of-government approach to synchronize efforts and voice (Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, 2016; National Defense Authorization Act, 2016).

Keywords: ISIS, social media, influence, military information support operations (MISO)

## INTRODUCTION

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Daesh, among other names, continues to spread its message and attract outsiders to its cause from occupied regions of Iraq and Syria. Coalition forces recently launched extensive cyber, air, and ground attacks aimed at the heart and headquarters of ISIS to break the group's grip on these territories and end its ability to inspire or direct terrorist attacks abroad (Baron, 2016). While a military victory would deny ISIS these safe havens, it would not solve the problems ISIS has created in the psychological and sociological aspects of the human domain; this can be achieved only through comprehensive engagement in the narrative space (Moore et al., 2016).

Special operations forces (SOF) maintain a range of core competencies to counter insurgent and terrorist threats across multiple domains, including employing military information support operations (MISO, formerly psychological operations) aimed at engaging these central human elements (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014). Conducting MISO through or supported by social media can be an effective form of persistent engagement, providing a timely message with extensive reach. In a recent congressional testimony, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, General Joseph Votel, called social media "an area of growth for us, an area we have to pay more and more attention"; Votel added that "messaging operations can't be an

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afterthought … [i]t has to be something that's baked into everything we're doing, it has to be something we look at right from the beginning as we conduct all operations" (Shane, 2016, p. 1). The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) must be prepared to operate effectively in the modern information environment and prevent such adversaries as ISIS from gaining asymmetric or even decisive advantages.

## ISIS SOCIAL MEDIA

Arguably the most confounding aspect of ISIS is the organization's unprecedented ability to capitalize on social media to further its efforts (Al-Tamimi, 2014; Brooking & Singer, 2016). To explain: While the potency and relatively low cost of social media is well known in both influence and commerce circles, few—if any—would have predicted its effectiveness in applying this medium in recruiting and sustaining foreign fighter flow into key war zones (Johnson, 2015). "The use of social media during terrorist attacks to incite and engage with followers and report to the media … is a new phenomenon, changing traditional notions of how terrorist groups communicate and organize," said CNN national security analyst Peter Bergen (Tadjdeh, 2014, p. 1).

Mainstream defense and intelligence analysts reason that the apparent domination of ISIS within social media is a by-product of advanced reach and message authenticity (Metz, 2015), meaning that anywhere the United States wants to penetrate, ISIS is already there—and with more powerful and resonant messaging. Brookings Institute estimates the number of ISIS Twitter accounts is more than 70,000 ("The ISIS Twiterrati," 2015).

Not surprisingly, and based on these assumptions, DOD, U.S. State Department, and intelligence agency efforts to counter ISIS messaging are tit-for-tat affairs: Be faster, be louder, and dominate the social media landscape to drown out the omnipresent ISIS narrative. And in doing so, ensure you do not accidentally offend the target audience (West, 2016). In theory, this principle seems like sound reasoning. It's no different from conventional MISO leaflet messaging, where presenting alternative perspectives to target audiences provides at least recognition of countering viewpoints. To vulnerable audiences surrounded by an array of perspectives, presence is a prerequisite for any eventual success (Munoz, 2012).

Still, this approach carries with it unwanted side effects. Making one's presence known also enables opposition to proactively plan countermeasures. In the ISIS example, the group is more familiar with native messaging conventions and already possesses established messaging networks. Thus, ISIS has an inherent advantage over the United States if the latter chooses to engage with similar audiences—and/or fails to celebrate information victories when they occur (West, 2016). Unfortunately, and over time, this level of counteractivity only strengthens ISIS's foothold. There are a finite number of opportunities to play cat-and-mouse before the cat surrounds the entire area with deadly and enticing mousetraps. U.S. messaging may become watered down and irrelevant, as alternative perspectives have only so many options to survive. They serve to reinforce the validity of the cat (Eichenwald, 2015; Zakaria, 2015).

Also, and in almost every instance, areas of penetration by ISIS are ones with unsophisticated media environments. Akin to Afghanistan, the United States was drawn to respond to the group's threatening social media efforts in full force, and in doing so saturated a messaging environment that was barely penetrated by native media, let alone by media from external entities.

This unnatural marriage became even more apparent as messaging featured complex subject matters including religion, violence, and ethnic obligation. In the Afghanistan media market today on display is the alarming, knee-jerk aftermath of billions of dollars spent in hopes of convincing a populace comfortable with traditional forms of communication to make complex decisions via alternative ones (Sreberny, 2008).

## AVOIDING MEASUREMENT FAUX PAS

Noting these problems, it should come as little or no surprise that accompanying attempts to measure social media effectiveness continue to prove an elusive task (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). With so much competing noise within formerly semiquiet spaces, determining true measures of effectiveness—let alone measures that might be abled to be replicated—seems unfeasible.

In its place emerged an arguable overreliance on trend data, most often obtained within these same social media channels as native language surveys about core belief systems. While trend data can yield useful insights about foundational values (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985), they add little connecting attitude and opinion formation to behavioral intent. In the ISIS example, this is perhaps where ideological and corresponding foreign fighter flow correlate (West, 2016).

From a data visualization perspective, what began as word clouds morphed into supposed predictive mechanisms about nodes and media space. Communication frequency and/or communicator associations served as desired outcomes. The glaring problem with this paradigm is that clever messaging can manipulate network and message-tracking systems to present a semblance of a network and/or overamplify the relevance of individuals within it (Kossinets & Watts, 2006). Monitored messaging and/or individuals can be covers for something a great deal more nefarious—and derived from different algorithms entirely.

A game theorist can take this battle of wills to the next level: After discovering a misdirection, the next step would be to attempt to unravel the misdirection formula. For the United States this could equate to a "bluffing the bluffer" chess match (Camerer, 2003): The players would undertake a delicate but controlled messaging campaign aimed at uncovering the true intent, while publicly attacking the secondary misdirection campaign as its seeming end goal.

However, as any marketing scholar can attest, all of these interventions make the situation worse. Akin to adding drops of iodine into a petri dish, with every intervention, misdirection, or otherwise, a messaging system becomes corrupted and potentially placebo (Shiv, Carmon, & Ariely, 2005), and with it opportunity to affect change in a desired direction. Thus enters a third variable: delicately trying to sustain some element of a natural messaging system within a potential misdirection campaign in attempts to uncover true intent or network movements behind them.

## LINKING ATTITUDES TO BEHAVIORAL INTENT

Combined, this maneuvering becomes an exhausting exercise undertaken while not knowing whether it's addressing the true goal of messaging warfare. Even in an ideal scenario, there is no perfect method to prove behavioral causality derived from persuasive messaging. Related, any and every messaging intervention—as evidenced in the Afghanistan example—comes at a literal and often very expensive price (Nixon, 2014): investing hundreds of millions of dollars, while

potentially three stages removed from the actual problem, and/or nonprescriptive to adversary behaviors, never briefs well.

This conundrum produced an unfortunate and additional side effect of giving rise to a boutique industry of ex-military and intelligence personnel producing behavioral prediction solutions claiming to address all of these steps (Duncan, 2016). Their popularity is not surprising; any form of potential measurement answer, even if not statistically correlated to the problem set at hand, is certainly more welcome than admiring a seeming impossibility of solving terror group recruitment and fighter flow.

This discussion is in no way intended to criticize these businesses or solutions. Per the previous discussion, these groups are working from the position of having decades of experience in psychological operations, and some offer sound approaches. Their systems are capable of informing trend information in traditional media markets and/or broad audiences. Likewise, they highlight overt shifts in opinion leaders within them.

The plot hole is an unprecedented adversary and problem space. ISIS is a non–nation state with global reach. It reinvents itself regularly, almost weekly, following regional events of significance, often times by other actors. Moreover, the social media platform landscape changes almost overnight, as do the security mechanisms to protect/infiltrate it. There is no realistic way to traditionally hunt an asymmetric adversary changing not only in appearance but in location and even species (Metz, 2015).

## EMPLOYING FUNDAMENTALS

And though the rules have changed, the concept of an ideologically based social movement with military intent is as old as civilization itself. Mirroring its predecessors, ISIS relies on cutting-edge technology platforms that they use in alternative ways. It does so expecting its adversaries, being traditional in structure, will be behind the curve in adapting to the threat (Metz, 2015). Ironically, however, an old-school approach to countering the ISIS threat is exactly what is needed. With near-infinite resources to communicate and cross-pollinate messaging, the military and marketing experts tasked with solving the ISIS problem seemingly forgot the very foundations of influence operations.

Traditional media measurement models are derived from social science theory, qualitative (focus group) and quantitative (survey) instruments featuring validated and proven constructs intended to gauge underlying attitudes and opinion drivers to eventual behaviors (Bryman, 2008). Returning to these concepts, trusting social science theory and proven measures to predict future ones also ensures that unwanted/unknown errors are not inserted into the system. In doing so, measurement criteria do not become the cart leading the horse in being too ISIS-centric or devoid of a baseline to compare it against.

The elephant in the room with such an approach is that military leadership must accept—in funds allocated and acceptance of success/failure—that attitudes and opinions can predict but never cause behavior. Even the most reliable social science instruments can at best statistically and significantly predict correlations between underlying attitudes and opinions to desired behaviors.

## ASSESSING ISIS INFLUENCE

While perhaps not ideal, the previous discussion offers a potential solution for the current ISIS recruitment problem. To employ this solution, practitioners tasked with solving the problem must first shift lenses to focus on underlying attitudes and beliefs versus an ISIS recruitment albatross. In other words, justifications for recruitment are based on a series of core attitudes and opinions, all of which can be measured. This measurement features social science theory–based, validated instruments designed to measure these very same attitudes and opinions (Converse & Presser, 1986).

Any good measurement consists of multiple methods. Qualitative interviewing can be invaluable, providing such interviews are rooted in questions/structures derived from similar theories as sister quantitative criteria. Subsequently, interview results should be objectively analyzed (via textual analysis, grounded theory, and/or like rigorous methods) to produce meaningful results. Assuming both are based in similar social science theory, quantitative results can be contrasted against qualitative ones to produce a rich data picture (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). This approach goes far beyond an analysis of raw social media metrics or human intelligence from limited sources (or a single person), which may not truly reflect the sentiment or pervasiveness of attitudes and opinions across the target population. This leads us to an element even more important than instrumentation: population. Any successful measurement effort requires proper audience segmentation (Czaja & Blair, 1996). Too broad an audience increases likelihood of causing the aforementioned iodine in the petri dish at later stages. ISIS recruits are not monolithic in current or alternative perspectives. Successful social media campaigns should target only primary versus secondary audience stakeholders.

Segmenting audiences requires an initial measurement step to identify said differences among potential recruits. First, investigate underlying attitudes and beliefs conducive to recruitment. Second, and ideally through a combination of interviews and surveys, yield some semblance of a line and block, attitude/opinion construct chart on what perspectives feed into others. The target behavior (e.g., ISIS recruitment) will be at the very top. Measuring foundational-level constructs at the very bottom will not only yield the most useful and replicable measurement data but also help identify where and how to segment audiences for recruitment. This information becomes vital when constructing messaging interventions at later stages. Refer to the appendix for general steps for countering influence, as well, as recruitment by ISIS as a specific example.

## EXTENDING MEASUREMENT TO PRACTICE

Over time, repeating the steps discussed in the appendix across various vulnerable populations both within a country and across a region will yield insights into the relationships among these populations (Firebaugh, 1997). In tandem, it will be essential to produce statistical evidence of where attitudes/opinion demarcation lines differ. More importantly, continued analysis can advise on how/where to target social and traditional media interventions. If this assessment is married to primary audience media-use preferences, a powerful recipe for how to effect change among them can emerge, as well as knowledge about where to effectively allocate funds. ISIS already employs social media methods as attitude/opinion feelers. The United States should be doing the same, albeit more systematically and with the goal of obtaining broader results.

Even with ISIS an arguable step ahead of such initiatives and/or conducting potential misdirection campaigns, these initiatives are likely immune to such effects. As such efforts do not target behaviors but rather the underlying and statistically significant attitudes/opinions which create/sustain them, manipulation likelihood is reduced to arguable insignificance. ISIS, first and foremost, is arguably interested in (recruitment) behavior near exclusively. Moreover, a joint, integrated marketing/measurement and intervention program greatly reduces the amount of intervention required to effect change (Ewing, 2009). Blanketing a target population is instead now attitude/opinion acupuncture, carefully segmented by city or area, and with it a robust measurement program continuously measuring and monitoring unique populations, relationships among them.

Finally, aligning on-the-ground, atmospherics intelligence collection with an assessment program can further enhance the overall data picture (Flynn, Pottinger, & Batchelor, 2010). Categorizing and aligning collection categories with those in an assessment program can potentially proactively identify areas of vulnerability and/or change within a target population. For example, physical manifestations (e.g., increased security measures, presence of improvised explosive devices [IEDs], communication norms within a village, and so on) should align with acquired data noting; for the previous example, this would include a heightened sense of fear, safety, or related constructs. Working as a collaborative engine, social media efforts can and should be used to convey messaging compatible with both shaping attitudes/opinions of a target population as well as reducing physical threats to U.S. interests within that area.

Still, these steps are neither airtight nor prescriptive. For example, individuals predisposed to nefarious action are logically more likely to pursue terrorist recruitment (Lieber, Efreom-Lieber, & Rate, 2011). Relatedly, segmenting audiences is a very careful science. In the previous example, population selection ignores the impact/effect of a growing female recruitment base on vulnerable males (Speckhard, 2015). Even the most carefully selected target audience does not exist in isolation.

## COORDINATING WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE

Properly engaging the right audience with the right message at the right time requires thoughtful assessment methods prior to and throughout influence operations. An added dynamic in U.S. influence efforts involves not only engaging effective channels of influence but also appropriately following bureaucratically dictated roles. Congress recently acknowledged MISO's integral role in armed conflict and has provided the U.S. secretary of defense broad latitude to conduct MISO and develop capabilities to reach target audiences in areas of hostilities or in other areas directly supporting commanders' objectives (National Defense Authorization Act, 2016). However, unlike many traditional, kinetic capabilities unique to DOD, information operations and MISO are carried out in an information space where other departments and agencies are also operating.

The DOD's role in the information environment differs in declared areas of hostility, versus other locations, and the nuanced distinctions among using information to inform, educate, persuade, or influence create artificial roles and boundaries depending on the audience. These artificial roles and boundaries often raise additional questions and considerations when they are applied to social media in the online domain. This emphasizes the need

for a coordinated, whole-of-government, strategic communication effort, which may not always place DOD in the lead role, to counter threats such as ISIS. To help address this need, the Department of State recently activated a new Global Engagement Center (GEC) to spearhead counter-violent-extremist communication efforts and more effectively coordinate, integrate, and synchronize messaging to foreign audiences (Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, 2016). Coordinating essential influence tasks, such as measurement, will identify priorities and ensure organizations provide complementary, and not duplicative, capabilities at the national level. For example, DOD data analysis could identify nonhostile areas where foreign fighters are originating. The Department of State's GEC may take the lead to build partner relationships and develop narratives around appropriate thematic campaigns. Integrating efforts with the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) would engage broader audiences and provide factual information to undermine ISIS disinformation. Synchronizing the objectives of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with messaging objectives could amplify influence efforts and address underlying sociological conditions that leave populations vulnerable to the pull of violent extremist organizations. This coordination would allow DOD SOF to fill a supporting role in this scenario, focusing on building partner nations' capacity to counter ISIS recruitment through social media messaging. This does not negate the need for the DOD to engage civilian audiences or maintain appropriate force capabilities; it merely serves to demonstrate a broader, synchronized U.S. government communication effort.

## CONCLUSION

One thing is certain. If the United States fails to contest the narrative and provide a credible, persuasive, and truthful alternative, adversaries will continue to exploit social media for their own ends. While it is difficult to fully quantify some metrics in this battle, such as how many potential ISIS terrorists have been turned away from the path of radicalization, other hierarchically linked indicators provide evidence to guide whole-of-government influence efforts and successfully conduct campaigns in the information environment. Ultimately, leveraging meaningful and timely assessments is essential to effective influence operations across any media channel.

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## APPENDIX. COUNTERING INFLUENCE PLAN

This section uses ISIS recruitment as a tangible example of how this proposed plan to counter influence would be undertaken. Table A1 lists the general steps in the plan. Following Table A1 are numbered paragraphs that apply these general steps to the example of ISIS recruiting.

TABLE A1. Generalized Plan to Counter Influence

| *Steps* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| 1 | Identify and segment audience re: problem behavior. |
| 2 | Conduct targeted interviews re: problem behavior. |
| 3 | Dissect interviews to identify underlying attitudes/opinions. |
| 4 | Organize attitudes/opinions into first-/second-order constructs. |
| 5 | Locate validated measures to test first-/second-order constructs. |
| 6 | Conduct pilot test; if satisfied, apply to wider sample. |
| 7 | Assess findings; apply to social media/atmospherics (as appropriate). |

1. Segment recruits by a particular country, then city/area within.

*Example 1*: Male, lower-middle-class, potential ISIS recruits (aged 18 to 35) with at least some college equivalent education, native to rural areas within Aleppo, Syria.

2. Conduct a series of individual/small group interviews to determine underlying thoughts and justifications for joining the ISIS movement for a near-immediate time frame.

*Example 2*: Based on Example 1, interview a series of individuals separately (or a few at a time) fitting the previous description. Within these interviews, gently explore (via a series of logically ordered questions/moderation) why interviewee(s) would actively support/denounce ISIS recruitment. Pay particular attention to stated root causes, rationale, and/or perceived effects on self/family to joining/rejecting the ISIS movement. Ensure questions build on one another, and be wary of groupthink/isolation among participants. Consult a university-level/industry-standard statistics/methodology textbook for guidelines on qualitative interview techniques.

3. Separate thoughts/justifications into a series of attitude/opinion constructs, for example, *trust, familial responsibility, community* (first order); *worry, risk, safety, economics, perception of others* (second order).

*Example 3*: Building from Examples 1 and 2, sort the responses into ordered groups, ensuring that items nest logically (i.e., make sure that subcategories are not listed as main categories). As much as possible, combine very similar responses into the same category to avoid redundancy. Third, items should branch into more subcategories as they are sorted from first- to second-order effects. Second-order constructs should expound on first-order constructs, and so on.

4. Create a line and block chart hierarchically linking these constructs (with recruitment at the top, followed by first-order constructs, then second-order constructs). Refer to Figure A1 for an example of these constructs.

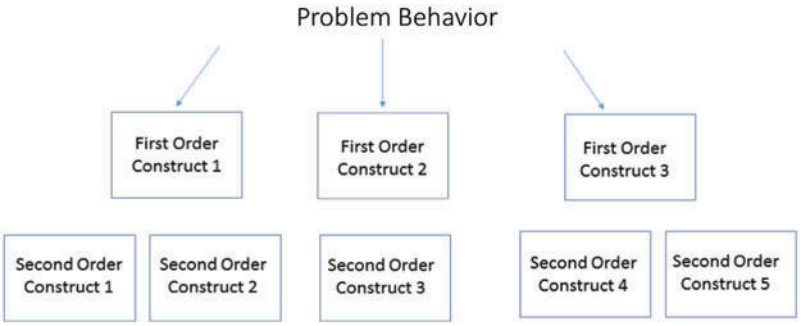


FIGURE A1 Hierarchy of constructs.

*Example 4*: In Examples 1 through 3, ISIS recruitment would be at top; followed by first-order constructs that include trust, familial responsibility, community; then second-order constructs that include worry, risk, safety, economics, perception of others.

5. Identify validated social theory intended to measure first- and second-order constructs (noted in Step 3).

*Example 5*: Building on Examples 1 through 4 and using a social science database (e.g., EBSCO, Academic Universe), identify validated social science theory used to measure (survey questions, interview templates) individual perceptions of trust, familial responsibility, community, risk, safety, economics, perception of others constructs.

While it is ideal for these measures to have been previously applied in testing similar populations/scenarios, this is secondary to locating testing instruments with good external validity (i.e., instruments tested many times, with an array of populations, producing meaningful results). Note that these measures are unlikely to contain most/all of the first- and/or second-order constructs. Still, try to limit measures to one or two testing instruments (to avoid excessive error by combining instruments and/or having to adjust for different measurement criteria/scales), depending on the number of items in each instrument. First-order items should be prioritized over second-order ones, especially those deemed most relevant based on the interviews conducted in Example 2.

Create a standardized survey instrument (with uniform scoring options, related) and/or survey template (to guide all interviews in an ordered fashion) based on these measures.

6. Conduct a series of interviews/surveys on these first/second order constructs (Step 3), derived in validated instrumentation (Step 5).

*Example 6*: Using appropriate selection criteria (e.g., snowball/random sampling), survey/interview individuals in Example 1 using the instrument created in Example 5.

Conduct a pilot test on at least three individuals to ensure accuracy, relevancy, and appropriateness of the proposed measure(s). Adjust as needed. Ensure the target sample for the wider population is appropriate for the analysis type (Step 7). Consult a university-level/industry-standard statistics/methodology textbook for guidelines on sampling techniques and/or required sample size. Conduct desired interviews/surveys.

7. Analyze/assess findings using statistical software and other objective means. Look for statistically significant associations between first- and second-order constructs (Step 4).

*Example 7*: Employ statistics software, as appropriate, to identify relationships between test instruments (Step 5, Example 5) and the tested sample (Step 6, Example 6). Statistically significant findings ($p < .05$) point to key relationships among the target audience (Step 1, Example 1). Again, consult a university-level/industry-standard statistics/methodology textbook for guidelines on quantitative/qualitative data assessment, appropriate conclusions inherent.

Multiple outcomes emerge from this exercise. First, proper audience segmentation is achieved. Second, underlying attitudes/opinions behind key behaviors (in this instance, ISIS recruitment) are identified. Third, a validated theory is identified to test against, which will limit measurement error. Fourth, an assessment program based on these steps, and assessed relationships, will be developed. Most importantly, among a vulnerable population, statistically significant attitudes/opinions capable of increasing/decreasing recruitment by ISIS among them will be discerned.

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# A Dilemma of Principles: The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare From a NATO Perspective

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has a unique perspective on the many challenges hybrid warfare presents to Europe's defense. After 12 years of concentrating on collective security (Rowberry, 2012), NATO is altering strategic and operational priorities because of the Russian Federation's engagement in hybrid warfare. The alliance is investing in the NATO Response Force (NRF), meaning special operations forces (SOF) will provide greater support to European collective defense (NATO, 2015a). Thus, it is valuable for the SOF community to understand the complexities influencing NATO's position in the current security environment.

Keywords: defense, NATO, Russia, hybrid warfare, information operations, psychological operations, SOF, NATO SOF, cultural intelligence, Russian military doctrine, international security, international community

The Alliance's principles are adversarial leverage in hybrid warfare, posing a dilemma in interdicting the Russian Federation's subversive activities in Europe. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) upholds principles of doctrine and follows policy for commitments to collective defense in Europe; meanwhile, a state is gaining time and opportunity for political–military objectives by maneuvering shrewdly through rules-based security architecture. Whether it concerns information, treaties, or covert military activities, the challenges present NATO with a dilemma of principles influencing NATO's perspective of and response to hybrid warfare.

The term *hybrid warfare* has neither an official NATO definition nor doctrine to explain strategic, operational, and tactical detail. Nevertheless, NATO officials use the phrases *hybrid threat* and *hybrid warfare* over other terminology, making it relevant to examine what it signifies. The NATO Capstone Concept attributes an adversarial entity using hybrid tactics with "the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives" (Miklaucic, 2011). Hybrid threats thrive in the unconstrained operating environment (NATO Allied Command Transformation [ACT], 2011), which can be urban and rural terrain as well as informational and cyber space.

A nonstate actor can generate hybrid threats. An example is the Islamic State, which combines global information operations, insurgency, civil war, and terrorism for battlefield

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success in Syria, Iraq, and Libya.[1] In 2015 the now former chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Dutch general Knud Bartels, referred to the Islamic State as a hybrid model (Giegerich, 2015). The concept of a hybrid model suggests that hybrid warfare can take different forms depending on attributes particular to nonstate and state actors. Since hybrid threats come in different forms, NATO facilitates communication among NATO members and those involved in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) to share strategies and form coalitions to address regional security issues and counterterrorism efforts.

Nonstate actors pose a dynamic security threat to the NATO member nations and PfP. However, the breadth of hard and soft power necessary to pose an imminent threat to NATO's territorial integrity and political cohesion is beyond the scope of a nonstate actor.[2]The greater concern for NATO is a state actor engaging in hybrid warfare as a holistic use of overt and covert kinetic and nonkinetic military activities, and using state-run tools to influence a foreign civilian population and to control foreign political decisions (Pindják, 2014).

The term *hybrid warfare* has its share of detractors. Some argue the term to be vague because it is an "umbrella term" (Van Puyvelde, 2015), or it is the same struggle between stronger and weaker entities using all means necessary (Raitasalo, 2015). However, there are two intertwined peculiarities distinguishing hybrid warfare for NATO: (a) a state's ability to comprehensively utilize political, diplomatic, military, economic, and social means to manipulate political objectives abroad; and (b) a state's practice to mask or deny attribution. To explain why these two elements are important, NATO's political command structure requires explanation.

NATO is an international political–military collective defense organization with 28 members. Its core principles are collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security (NATO, 2010). The political command structure starts with the North Atlantic Council (NAC), which is composed of national representatives acting as the ultimate approval authority for NATO, and all decisions are based on consensus.[3] The consensus of all 28 member nations is required to invoke an article of the 1949 Washington Treaty (NATO, 1949), meaning the threat must be weighed uniformly by each nation on political and diplomatic levels and through consultation. NATO's political command structure is a testament to contemporary democratic principles, because the power over military assets rests with elected civilian nationals.

NATO's military power is a reflection of voluntary contribution, and the structures coordinating military assets follow principle-driven doctrine and policy based on political command decisions. The early phases of the NATO Crisis Management Process seek to mitigate escalation of conflict through diplomatic and political means. In the case that a state actor denies culpability for subversive military and nonmilitary activities, it impedes a NATO military response through the political command structure. This creates a response dilemma for NATO owing to the precarious nature of upholding principles while countering an adversary that leverages these professional standards for advantage.

[1] Also known as ISIS, ISIL, and Da'ish, among other names. The term *Islamic State* implies neither official nor recognized statehood.

[2] There are exceptional non-state actors whose power subjugates the authority of official state military and security forces, which can prompt capacity-building missions based on official state request and authority from the United Nations, such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Mandate. Islamic State is an example of an entity that could be an exception: It floats between nonstate and state actor, like a governing actor; it controls territory, deploys forces, governs state assets, and performs state duties, despite Syrian State and Iraqi State military resistance.

[3] For nuclear-related matters, the NATO Nuclear Planning Group is the ultimate authority. NATO military action is tied to the United Nations Security Council and its mandates.

The Russian Federation cannot compete with the military assets NATO is able to amalgamate, which is 10 times the armed force of Russia, as explained by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2015 (Putin, 2015). This is why Russian hybrid warfare strategy seeks to break the Alliance by making NATO look weak in collective defense, which can rattle member and partner commitments. Furthermore, the Russian Federation does not make military decisions based on multinational consensus, thus having the flexibility to ignore international standards and agreements. By leveraging this advantage and impeding a NATO military response, the Russian Federation pursues its own political–military objectives, as seen in Ukrainian territory (NATO, 2014a).

The 2014 Maidan protests in Kiev showed a Ukraine wanting reform and membership in NATO (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty [RFERL], 2015). This prospect threatens Russian regional influence, thus encouraging a need to detour Western investment in Ukraine by contributing to armed conflict (NATO, 2015b). The Russian Federation's tactic to prevent Ukraine's bid to join NATO used the Alliance's standards in the Membership Action Plan (MAP, 1999): A state requesting to join NATO must resolve all internal conflict and external border disputes.

During the Maidan protests, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych literally fled Ukraine for Moscow in February 2014, meaning a pro-Russian Ukrainian political authority no longer led Ukraine. The Russian Federation perceived several risks, such as the future of the Kharkiv Pact, energy security, and an encroaching NATO presence threatening Western dominance. There is a correlation between the Russian Federation's political interests, the Russian military's view on contemporary warfare, and consequent military and nonmilitary activities.

Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the general staff of the armed forces of Russia and first deputy defense minister army general, provided his perception of modern warfare in a December 2013 article. General Gerasimov (2013) explained the evolution of contemporary warfare: It begins by targeting a civilian population through a broad range of economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary means to instigate protest and revolt; once the necessary amount of pressure is placed on the civilian population, overt military activities can be used to ensure success. General Gerasimov's observations on modern conflict are an undertone in the unclassified Russian military doctrine that was updated in 2014, several months after his published article.

According to the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (MDRF, 2014), modern warfare is a complex mix of special operations, military force, and nonmilitary means of a political, economical, and informational character (articles 7, 15.a). In addition, Russian State defense planning and political–military objectives necessitate political, diplomatic and economic means, nongovernmental assets, international organizations and private firms in military defense, and investment in special operations, ground forces, and information operations (article 9). Indeed, MDRF cites NATO as a territorial threat to the Russian Federation, its citizens, and partners (MDRF, 2014, articles 5, 12.a).

When considering Russian political objectives in tandem with Russian military conceptual thought and defense planning, a parallel exists between NATO's perception of hybrid warfare and the Russian Federation's activities aimed at Eastern Europe. This correlation is evident in three categories: (a) maneuvering through international laws and treaties as a signatory; (b) targeting of foreign civilian populations with information and psychological operations, disinformation, and propaganda; and (c) prevarication on covert and overt military operations.

## POLITICAL–DIPLOMATIC TACTICS: ACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND TREATIES

Treaties and agreements are only as effective as the guarantors' commitment to the spirit and purpose of the documents. From NATO's perspective, the Russian Federation is violating principles of the NATO–Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations (1997). Specific transgressions involve transparency, rule of law, respecting state sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, and prevention of conflicts (Founding Act, 1997). Even with NATO-specific agreements aside, the Russian Federation exemplifies political–diplomatic tactics of hybrid warfare with additional transgressions of the Vienna Document, the Minsk Agreement, and the Open Skies Treaty.

As part of European cooperative security, the Vienna Document specifies that participating states must inform of military activities with guidelines such as the amassing of 13,000 or more troops (Arms Control Association, 2010).[4] The number of Russian troops involved in exercises was kept slightly under the Vienna Document's stated limit (NATO School Oberammergau, 2015), but the failure to invite for observation violated the agreement. Moreover, the Russian Federation refused transparency on military activities near Ukraine's border despite stipulations in the Vienna Document (Baer, 2014a). While signatories of the Vienna Document and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) attempt to push compliance, Russian military activities continue. Not only does this impact decisions from NATO's political command structure, it also poses a dilemma for NATO and Member nations to mitigate conflict in Ukraine.

The Alliance supports diplomatic tools for conflict resolution, such as the Minsk Agreement, which intends to de-escalate fighting in Ukraine. Intermittently, eastern separatists, augmented by the Russian military, break ceasefires, and firefights go back and forth (Stoltenberg, 2015b). Interestingly, the Russian Federation strategically implements ceasefires through diplomatic means to assist operations (Davis, 2014). Through complicated maneuvers, the Russian military uses distraction tactics to obstruct detection of military activities near Ukraine's border (Davis, 2014). In March 2014, Ukraine invoked article 14 of the NATO–Ukraine Charter; by April, Ukraine officially and publicly requested NATO's assistance (NATO, 2015c). However, NATO principles and commitments limit the extent of military support to Ukraine.

The Open Skies Treaty allows transparency to generate confidence, which is why any hindrance to signatories therein is viewed as deception. The Open Skies Treaty is a paper instrument verifying military activity that the Russian Federation obstructs through airspace restrictions and prevention of quota flights (Delawie, 2015). By taking advantage of technicalities in the Open Skies Treaty, the Russian Federation is able to pursue its military objectives while hindering observation by NATO members.

Like military activities, compliance with ballistic arms reduction and nuclear weapon–related treaties is vital to building trust among nations. In 2014, the United States stated that the Russian Federation had violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (BBC United States and Canada, 2014). Actually enforcing the Russian Federation's transparency and compliance to treaties is a dubious endeavor, because it centers on voluntary compliance (Dodge, 2014). A similar dilemma exists for other weapons of mass destruction, such as

[4] The Vienna Document stipulates observation for 13,000 troops and advance notification for 9,000 troops.

chemical, biological, and radiological weapons (Vershbow, 2015). Despite the actions of the Russian Federation, the guiding principles and inherent compliance requirements of treaties, agreements, and acts dictate NATO's political and military decision-making process.

The Russian Federation does not disregard all international commitments, because the intent is to remain a global player. The intermittent transgressions intend to impede NATO military response, enhance Russian military capabilities, and block access to certain Russian military activities. The dilemma for NATO is that the Russian Federation is able to create time and opportunity for its political–military endeavors while remaining influential and active in European and international security.

## POLITICAL–INFORMATIONAL TACTICS: INFORMATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS, DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS, AND PROPAGANDA

Army General Gerasimov (2013) characterizes modern warfare as being "waged from a basis of clandestine, military means of informational and kinetic special operations." The Russian Federation views the control of information and the power of influence over foreign and domestic populations as key to successful, long-term political–military objectives. This is why information and psychological operations have a critical role in kinetic military operations. The following examples of Crimea, Ukraine, and Latvia illustrate NATO's challenge in countering the Russian Federation's proficiency in targeting Russian-speaking populations.

### Crimea

The Russian Federation targeted the Crimean civilian population and the Russian-speaking world by framing the 2014 annexation of Crimea with history and culture. The Russian storyline begins with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gifting Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, and framing the past 60 years as merely a prolonged absence. On Russian national television, President Putin expressed tearful joy that the Crimean people were finally coming back home to Russia (Nevskie Novosti, 2014). It is important to note that narrative and psychological operations are valued at the highest political echelon of the Russian State because investment starts at the top.

### Ukraine

In March 2015, a Russian State–supported documentary, *Crimea's Path Home*, traced the Maidan protests to Crimea's annexation. It highlights the Russian State's role as saving and supporting Ukraine during a tragic period (Kondrashov, 2015). *Crimea's Path Home* defends covert military operations and employs Putin as a guide to relate the story with a personal touch. This type of well-made Russian media content is strategic because it fits into a comprehensive political narrative understandable to any Russian-speaking audience.

In hybrid warfare strategy, information operations facilitate political–military objectives if the target civilian population perceives coercive military force as an extension of friendly, humanitarian assistance. In 2013, Putin described Ukrainians and Russians as one people, with the goal of garnering pro-Russian support from Ukrainian popular opinion. In 2014, Putin declared the future of Ukraine and Russia to be one, and called the security of Ukraine

a duty for Russia; approval of military force from the Russian Duma followed soon afterward (Nevskie Novosti, 2014). If a military invasion of Ukraine proves prosperous for the Russian Federation, the narrative is already established to support kinetic military operations; however, if a military invasion proves too laborious, the Ukrainian civilian population remains malleable to influence for future endeavors. Either way, the Russian Federation positions itself advantageously.

## Latvia

As a NATO and European Union member, Latvia withstands Russian media influence more than Ukraine. Nevertheless, Latvians are still a target audience for Russian State disinformation campaigns and propaganda because of language and history. The Russian State–operated news channel Rossiya 1 aired a report titled "Americans at Our Borders," which portrayed NATO training exercises outside of Riga as preparation for an invasion of Russia. The report attempted to rattle Latvian popular support by accusing NATO soldiers as being detrimental to Latvia's civilian population. Even a former Soviet Union war veteran stated, "Wherever America goes, it's a mess" (Kiselev, 2015a). There is an emphasis on blaming the United States in order not to alienate European partners. Over time, this type of corrosive disinformation can influence civilian populations with access to Russian State news channels.

In March 2015, Russian State-operated news channel Vesti aired a report titled "Breedlove Against Europeans," which recapped an article published by German newspaper *Der Spiegel* (Gebauer, 2015). The Russian version claims that the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), U.S. Air Force General Philippe Breedlove, fabricates intelligence on Russian military activities in and near Ukraine, as well as impedes Germany's diplomatic approach to Russia (Kiselev, 2015b). The Vesti report is for a Russian-speaking audience and serves two purposes for Russian information operations: (a) it proliferates the falsehood that Germany distrusts NATO and SACEUR; and (b) Germany does not perceive Russia as a threat to Ukraine.

Russian military doctrine stipulates targeting civilian populations with information under the purpose of protecting history, spirituality, and tradition (MDRF, 2014). On the contrary, NATO information and psychological operations are subject to restrictions. If the Alliance deviated from policy to compete with the Russian strategy, it would break principles established to protect civilians from manipulation and subversive foreign influence.

The Alliance communicates through NATO Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy with official statements, releases, and online information (NATO International Military Staff [IMS], 2011). Every word reflects all 28 nations, which is why word choice and assessments are subject to standards of image, accuracy, and implication. NATO uses social media tools to inform of the Alliance's activities, maintaining restrictions on content as per NATO STRATCOM guidelines, approved audiences, and in adherence to Allied Command Operations (ACO) Social Media Policy (NATO Public Affairs Office [PAO], 2014). However, the use of digital content and social media that has an official NATO seal to disseminate counter information is limited.

NATO officials counter disinformation with fact, as demonstrated by General Breedlove. In response to *Der Spiegel*'s article, General Breedlove explained that NATO intelligence reports and measurements of analysis vary by nation (Kirschbaum and Korkemeier, 2015). The NATO website published "NATO–Russia Relations: The Facts," available in Russian,

Ukrainian, English, and French (NATO, 2015b). The truth and facts are powerful; however, in certain circles Russian propaganda still enjoys an advantage of perception. The Russian State has the advantage of guiding Russian media without national caveats and multinational consensus.

## POLITICAL–MILITARY TACTICS: COVERT AND OVERT DEPLOYMENT OF MILITARY AND STATE SECURITY FORCES

Another dilemma confronts NATO when a state engages in subversive covert military activities abroad, because it can influence political change for undetected periods. Even after detection occurs, lack of official admission by the infringing state impedes decisions at NATO's political level. The Russian Federation demonstrated this hybrid warfare tactic with the annexation of Crimea to achieve political–military objectives in Eastern Europe.

In February 2014, video footage on social media appeared of armed, masked Russian troops without insignia driving unmarked transport vehicles in Crimea (Krayutsa, 2014); in addition, video footage of the seizure of Crimea's parliament supported assessments of Russian special forces' involvement (Synovitz, 2014). Despite evidence on the Internet from witnesses in Crimea, the Russian Federation officially denied any military involvement in Crimea outside of regular deployments.

The International Community's outrage over covert Russian military operations coercing the Crimean population pressured Russian officials to provide a defense. Now-deposed Ukrainian President Yanukovych stated he requested Russia's military assistance to maintain control of Ukraine in a letter dated March 1st, 2014 (RFERL, 2014). The same day, the Russian Duma approved deployment of Russian military forces to Ukraine under reasons of Ukrainian national security and protecting Russian citizens (Perviye Kanal, 2014). By March 24, 2014, the last Ukrainian military base, Feodosia, was seized by the Russian military eight days after a Crimean referendum passed to join the Russian Federation (BBC Europe, 2014). By using accepted NATO and international standards of humanitarian aid, request for assistance and democratic voting, the Russian Federation was able to deter a potential NATO military response in Crimea.

By April 17, 2014, Russian President Putin had contradicted his earlier statements, confirming the presence of Russian troops in Crimea under the pretext of "keeping order during elections and upholding the will of the Crimean people" (Putin, 2014). Once the referendum to join passed, the preexisting Russian military forces enforced Crimea's new status as part of the Russian Federation, affording the Russian State with a prime, full-time military position on the Black Sea. The obstacle for NATO was that the Russian Federation's military activities in Crimea occurred clandestinely and quickly.

According to the OSCE and NATO, the Russian Federation deployed covert military personnel to Eastern Ukraine to augment and support civilian combatant groups opposing the Ukrainian government (Baer, 2014). Ukrainian military officials claimed the presence of Chechen State military in Rostov-na-Donu and Donetsk (Ibragimov and Ivanov, 2014), which Ramzan Kadyrov, the President of Chechnya, denied (BBC Russian Service, 2014). Assertions of Russian paramilitary training, special operations, and armed support of Ukrainian separatists have persisted since 2013 (Ukraine Today, 2014). However, the characteristics of civil war,

insurgency, and foreign paramilitary training of civilians in Eastern Ukraine test the boundaries of NATO's military assistance limitations.

NATO responded by suspending the NATO–Russia Council on April 1st, 2014, and limiting cooperation to diplomatic dialogue (Vale, 2014). Indeed, NATO released intelligence satellite images of Russian military tanks in rebel-held areas of Eastern Ukraine to defend assertions (NATO ACO, 2014). However, the Russian Federation was able to achieve political–military objectives by leveraging NATO's political command structure and bureaucratic construction. As General Breedlove explained, hybrid warfare is particularly challenging because of the lack of attribution from a state (Garamone, 2015). Still, neither the Russian Federation nor its Federal Republics admits participation in Ukraine's continuing crisis.

## OVERT POSTURING: MISSILE DEFENSE AND CYBERSPACE

NATO and the Russian Federation have a commonality: Both derive significant power and authority from nuclear weapons and first-strike capabilities.[5] According to Russian military doctrine, the future rests on tactical nuclear weapons, air–space defense, ballistic missile capabilities, robotic advancements, and space military technologies (TVTS, 2015). Russian military defense planning includes investments in cyberspace, space, and air-defense missile systems (Gerasimov, 2014), indicating an increase in spending for preparation of future conflict and warfare.

Several NATO members and the Russian Federation are signatories of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. While many NATO members prefer to eliminate nuclear weapons from political strategy, NATO is and will remain a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear deterrence is a powerful political tool in international security (NATO, 2012). For deterrence against Russian State posturing, the forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe is technically an option (Millar, 2003). Conversely, it poses a dilemma for NATO members in terms of commitments to nonproliferation and disarmament.

The fact that the Russian Federation is enhancing its military and missile defense systems means NATO has to evolve with missile defense, space, and cyber technologies and security. NATO joint operations, global communications, and missile defense systems depend on interconnected relationships of space and cyberspace (Swarts, 2015), meaning all these network systems are targets. This is an avenue of hybrid warfare, considering reports of Russian State involvement in cyber hacking Ukrainian intelligence communications (Davis, 2014), and U.S. government systems (Fox-Brewster, 2015). Cyber attacks can invoke article 5 (McLeary, 2015), and the discussion for greater cyber security continues on NATO's political level, but like all decisions it must meet consensus.

Defense against hybrid warfare is a financial dilemma for NATO because it requires making several costly areas top priorities. Economic circumstances impact national budgets, which

[5] NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence (NIAMD) is the Alliance's construct to defend against ballistic missile attacks and other airborne lethal objects. NATO Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) is the alliance's capacity for collective defense against ballistic missiles and plays a role in deterrence against hybrid warfare. For reference, see NATO, 2016; NATO, 2014b.

consequently affects common funding afforded to NATO by each nation. The consequence of shrinking budgets means NATO bodies have to set priorities within the parameters of multinational budgetary restrictions.

With the weight of these dilemmas in mind, NATO is developing a comprehensive approach for collective defense against hybrid warfare. Part of the strategy includes ushering the kinetic and nonkinetic capabilities of NATO SOF to the forefront, under the command of SACEUR. NATO Special Operations Headquarters coordinates and directs the flexibility and interoperability of the NATO Response Force (NRF) (Stoltenberg, 2015b). The NRF is increasing from 13,000 to 30,000 personnel, including a rapid reinforcement capability the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).

The VJTF, also referred to as the Spearhead Force, comprises air, maritime, and SOF that are able to deploy within 48 to 72 hours (NATO, 2014b). This resource will provide NATO decision makers with the flexibility of assets and responses imperative to counter a range of hybrid threats in real time. To support the VJTF, six commands have been activated by NATO Force Integration Units in Eastern Allied nations, providing a forward area near the Russian Federation's borders (NATO Response Force, n.d.). The dynamic skill sets of SOF are vital for NATO to handle the complexities of hybrid warfare and the multidirectional nature of international security.

During the Collective Security Treaty Organization Summit in Dushanbe on September 15, 2015, Russian President Putin announced that components of the Russian military are supporting the Syrian State with tactical military assistance under justification of fighting terrorism (Siraziev, 2015). With political and military assistance, NATO and the Russian Federation are supporting opposing entities in Ukraine, while some NATO members and the Russian Federation are supporting opposing entities in Syria. Given the quick pace of the complex security environment, greater informational capabilities for optimal situational awareness, indicators, and warnings will not cease to be a necessity for NATO. This makes SOF the ideal resource for challenges within the "gray zone" of hybrid warfare.

The Russian Federation, among others, effectively uses cultural information and the human dimension of hybrid strategy to advance objectives, which is why NATO needs parallel advantages. Instead of fundamentally changing NATO to meet these obstacles, NATO can enhance its cultural intelligence capabilities to support a wide range of operations, including informational and cyber warfare. Integrating cultural intelligence to support SOF is a natural fit, representing an opportunity for NATO in countering hybrid threats.

In many respects, it seems as though NATO is at a precipice. If NATO solely maintains the status quo, then its ability to engage in hybrid warfare is inhibited. If NATO changes its structure to adapt to evolving threats, then its founding purpose is at risk and it must renegotiate a massive, multinational, bureaucratic political–military organization. Choosing one option or the other is neither optimal nor practical, particularly considering that NATO is not a broken organization.

The path forward is rather more nuanced than direct. Whether we are facing a state or nonstate actor, the great challenge of hybrid warfare is discovering the means to engage adversaries operating with different rules, without compromising principles. As stated in article 23 of the Wales Summit: "The Alliance does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia. But we cannot and will not compromise on the principles on which our Alliance and security in Europe and North America rest" (NATO, 2014b).

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# BOOK REVIEWS

Zuckoff, Michael. *13 Hours: The Inside Account of What Really Happened in Benghazi*. New York, NY: Twelve, 2014. 344 pp. + notes and index. $9.99 (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-1-4555-3839-3

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A great deal of controversy surrounds the events of the night of September 11, 2012, in Benghazi, Libya—controversy regarding not only the events which took place on the ground but also the context and causation of the attack. Zuckoff's *13 Hours* is an attempt to describe the ground truth of that night. The author is quite clear up front: The narrative is not meant to wade into the political infighting and accusations that surround some of the political personalities involved. That particular story continues to be hashed out in the halls of Congress and on the campaign trail. As noted by the author, *13 Hours* is a recounting of events brought forth from primary-source research through interviews with some of the people directly involved. While the author states that the work is not intended to take sides, undertones run throughout the book. The author deserves credit for objectivity and clear honesty in stating that the individuals and families of survivors have a direct financial stake in the book.

Michael Zuckoff is a professor of journalism at Boston University and the author of several nonfiction books. He gives coauthorship credit to the surviving members of the Annex Security Team, employees of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) who fought throughout the night of September 11, 2012, and credits their actions with saving the lives of approximately two dozen Americans. This coauthorship and the primary-source material referenced throughout the book lend an air of authenticity to the telling, which has a direct and bold style.

Zuckoff brings a journalist's perspective to the writing, which makes it readable without the typical pedantic academic dryness of some accounts. Interwoven into his chronological narrative is a blending of personalities and motives that, while undoubtedly factual, highlights the sometimes precarious relationships between people with military backgrounds and those who, while operational in a sense, come from a civilian or managerial background. This undertone resonates throughout the work, leaving the impression of what may seem to be dysfunction to an outsider but will feel familiar to an audience which has witnessed the cultural dichotomies of an interagency or joint force firsthand. It is this underlying tension combined with the narrative which Zuckoff pulls off brilliantly but which will likely be lost on many readers.

The chronological narrative of the work follows the coordinated attacks on the American diplomatic compound followed later by the assault on a clandestine CIA annex located

approximately half a mile away. In essence the book covers not a single event but rather coordinated attacks on two separate compounds. The Annex Security Team responded to the first attack, in which Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens died, as well as the lesser-known, subsequent, and more prolonged attack on the CIA annex itself. The accounts are harrowing, with no lack of the kind of action expected in such a book, and the bravery of the Annex Security Team is unquestionable.

The work does bring up many troubling issues even though it is meant to be and is almost wholly written without bias; such issues include assumptions that are deeply ingrained in U.S. foreign policy, the formulation of strategy, and, most importantly, assumptions the United States makes as a whole about how we interact with the world. The author is clever in laying out the factual details without delving into the wider implications of the events. The construction of the narrative allows readers to extrapolate from the events whatever level of further analysis they wish to undertake without leading readers to definite conclusions. Undoubtedly, those who take issue with the official account of events and some of the associated spin will find ample ammunition to remain dissatisfied. Conversely, those who simply want to read a true story full of action, during which Americans perform heroically, will be pleased. For the reader who questions how the United States is perceived in many supposedly friendly Arab countries, the account is troubling at best. Zuckoff uses the Benghazi incident to bring into question our assumptions of the validity of regime change with an assumption of the inevitability and value of de facto follow-on democratic process. Beyond an honest description of the events that took place that night lurks the list of uncomfortable issues which are not discussed in this book but of which the author is undoubtedly aware.

Whether *13 Hours* will have an impact on the ongoing debate over Benghazi, or on Hillary Clinton's campaign for presidency, is unforeseeable. But for readers who wish to understand the events of September 11, 2012, from the perspectives of some of the individuals who fought there, Zuckoff's book is an excellent place to start. And those who simply want a good action read will not be disappointed.

Galeotti, Mark. Spetsnaz*: Russia's Special Forces*. Illustrated by Johnny Shumate. New York, NY: Osprey, 2015. 62 pp. + bibliography and index. $18.95 (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-1-4728-0722-9

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Russian military expert Mark Galeotti offers the reader a succinct, detailed, and well-illustrated account of Russia's special operations forces (SOF)—or, more precisely, their special designation forces, or *voiska spetsial'naya naznacheniya*, commonly referred to as *Spetsnaz*. The book is more than that, however, as it even covers other SOF-like units attached to the interior ministry and regular field army, such as Russia's elite airborne forces.

The book is at once both a mini encyclopedia and an interesting narrative. With its rich detail and comprehensive coverage, it approaches being an encyclopedia on Russian SOF. At the same time it tells the story of the formation and employment of various *Spetsnaz* units, from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution to the through the time of publication. This breadth of discussion means the topics covered include World War II, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, both Chechen wars, and the 2008 Georgia war. In fact, it covers every major military engagement to the present, including a brief section on Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

In addition to succinct and well-written prose, *Spetsnaz: Russia's Special Forces* is filled with both photographs and artistic renderings of *Spetsnaz* soldiers, their equipment, weapons, and dress, again from the earliest period through today. Those who want details of the various *Spetsnaz* units and their kits will not be disappointed by Galeotti's impressive coverage and Shumate's illustrations.

There are many books available covering the topic of Russian special forces. Most books tend to be "shoot and tell" accounts by former *Spetsnaz* operators or about them. This particular book is recommended as a good place to start reading on the subject because of its great historical and chronological coverage as well as the detail offered. If you're looking for the latter, I highly recommend *Spetsnaz: Russia's Special Forces*. The author and illustrator are to be commended for their contribution to this important area of research.

Stilwell, Alexander. *Special Forces in Action: Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Africa, Balkans*. London, UK: Amber Books, 2015. 224 pp. $34.95 (hardcover). ISBN-10: 1782742549

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Books with a number of glossy pictures seem to have a bad reputation among academics. So it was when I began reading Alexander Stilwell's *Special Forces in Action*. Noting its slick cover and numerous pictorial representations, a colleague even commented, "It looks like a coffee-table book." However, one should not judge a book by its cover—or, in this case, the number of glossy photos. *Special Forces in Action* examines the actions of elite military forces from 1990 to time of publication in 2015. It is an impressive chronology of notable special operations conducted from the First Gulf War to actions against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The book is regionally focused. With a short introduction to the origins of modern special forces, Stilwell uses T. E. Lawrence (also known as Lawrence of Arabia) and General Frank Dow Merrill (of the famed Merrill's Marauders of World War II) to introduce the concept of using special tactics, techniques, and training to overcome an adversary. Following the introduction, the chapters focus on special operations in the First Gulf War, Africa, the Balkans, South America, Afghanistan, and Iraq. There is a final section devoted especially to counterterrorism (CT), which covers more recent CT operations around the globe.

Although most of the book focuses on British and American special operations forces (SOF), the author also chronicles other special operations units from France, Israel, Australia, Canada, South America, and Russia. Early in the work Stilwell addresses his bias: Having served in the British Territorial Army and trained with the British Special Forces, he is partial to their plight. However, this precludes him from delving deeper into areas for fear of putting current or future operations at risk. A pure academic or journalist would perhaps involve himself or herself in researching a little deeper; however, this is a place that Stilwell will not go, and understandably so.

Despite that caveat, the author presents a number of impressive details on special operations, including the little-known Delta Force operation by American operators to free hostage James Foley in 2014. The operation ended in failure because Foley was moved prior to the raid, but Stilwell is able to bring to light some important details in the conduct of the mission.

The book is a strong introduction to the understanding the varied missions and difficult challenges of SOF all over the world.

The pictures do a superb job of cataloging the SOF story as a visual representation of the narrative painted by Stilwell. There is an editor's glitch on page 59 of the book, where a photograph purported to represent Mohammed Farah Aideed is actually an Afghani insurgent. Such a small error does not take away from the clear and succinct writing and pictorial presentation of this book.